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# the ecumenical review

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Volume 43 Number 2, April 1991

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THE CANBERRA ASSEMBLY:  
EXPECTATION AND EXPERIENCE



World Council of Churches

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# the ecumenical review

Volume 43, Number 2, April 1991

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## The quarterly of the World Council of Churches

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### Editorial

“Come, Holy Spirit — Renew the Whole Creation.” The prayer-theme of the WCC seventh assembly had become a *cri du coeur*, a passionate calling on the power of God during the weeks before the assembly. The breaking out of the Gulf war raised the question: “Should the assembly be held? Will it not give the impression of ‘business as usual’? Will it not indicate that we are out of touch with the real problems of the world, wanting in solidarity with those who are suffering?” A number of people were of the opinion that precisely because there *is* such a serious crisis in the world we must meet, and together pray for the inspiration of the Spirit.

For us in the World Council itself the advice of the churches in the Middle East was decisive. They wanted the churches to come together from around the world to pray for them and with them, and to search for ways to express our obedience and our response to what the Spirit is saying to the churches.

The first and clearest answer to our prayer for the coming of the Holy Spirit is the very fact that the assembly was held. Delegates, advisers, observers, visitors, journalists — in coming together we recovered a sense of belonging to the fellowship of churches. We could meet, crossing all walls of separation and proving that we are a communion that cannot be destroyed even by the terrible reality of war. The Spirit brought us and kept us together, and notwithstanding our differences and misunderstandings, we realize once again that we belong to each other and that there is no other way forward than deepening our communion in Christ.

A second response to our prayer is related to two fears which were evident before the assembly met. Both of these arose out of the crisis in the Gulf. The first fear was that this crisis would so dominate discussions that the assembly would have no chance to look at the ecumenical movement as a whole, to discern directions for the future work of the Council and the churches in the broadest possible perspective. The other fear was precisely the opposite, that the assembly would not be able adequately to

address this specific tragic issue of the Gulf war. I think that both fears were proved to be unfounded. The spiritual reality of our common worship created a sense of transcendence and of communion that put the crisis in the world into its proper frame of reference. It was not a matter of winning or losing a political battle in the assembly, but an existential, spiritual walking together with the suffering people of the Middle East in the search for a just solution.

The first manifestation of the assembly's concern was a peace march through the city of Canberra. We were joined by thousands of people from local churches. It was followed by a prayer vigil through the night, concluding in a liturgical celebration. We could not pretend to have any special wisdom to solve the problems in the Gulf but we could offer the vision of the crucified Lord and the promise of resurrection to help us and others to try again and again to take the path of peace.

Then came the long debate. From the very beginning, especially in the exchange of greetings with the prime minister of Australia, the issue had been clearly stated: what was the best way to affirm justice for the Kuwaiti people and to redeem so much suffering through facing squarely all the basic issues of the region? The resolution approved by the assembly belongs now to our common history. But the value of our discussions lies more in their openness than in the interchanges that took place. The democratic process of expressing our views took four hours in plenary session. It was at times very chaotic, but it was also surprising to see how, even within that chaos, reciprocal correction was taking place and a dimension of reciprocal trust was being built. We read in the scriptures that the Holy Spirit was hovering over the chaos at the beginning of creation; in all humility we hope that the Creator Spirit was also hovering over our own chaos, and was able to use the frailty of our human judgments to serve the cause of justice, and finally the cause of peace.

The debate on the Gulf crisis inevitably reopened the issue of the proper Christian attitude to war as such. This has been with us since the first WCC assembly in Amsterdam in 1948. The position of the World Council has been the systematic rejection of war as a way to overcome differences between human groups. This time it was particularly difficult because we sought not only to make a general statement on war, but to apply our principles to a specific conflict.

We entered the assembly through the smoke which traditionally expresses Aboriginal spirituality. The encounter with the original inhabitants of the land left a lasting impression on all of us, and I hope that in the years ahead the WCC will seek deeper relations with people who stand close to the land — and who usually have a long history of being oppressed. This encounter was not new, either for the churches in Australia (which are already fully involved in this issue) or for the WCC (which in 1981 organized a team visit to Aboriginal settlements, and brought out a report that made a substantial contribution to the national debate in Australia). But this time the Aboriginal friends were there to receive us; they were hosting the assembly. They shared with us their life, their worship, their culture, their dreams and hopes. They trusted us. We were deeply touched by the candour, the simplicity, the openness and the richness of the reception given us by Aboriginal brothers and sisters.

We find in the documents of the assembly several resolutions on land rights, the need for the recognition of Aboriginal rights, and so on. These are necessary, and will have their consequences in the life of our churches. But in no case shall we pretend to find solutions for others. Both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal Australians are looking



for such solutions, and we give our full support to this process. Within the family of sharing, the Aboriginal peoples have blessed us. This blessing will be shared with all the churches in the world, and their story will be told. New prayers and a new sense of respect will grow everywhere. I hope that our Aboriginal brothers and sisters, through their strong presence at the assembly, have come to know that they belong to the wider ecumenical family, that they belong rightfully to the common house of Jesus Christ.

The theme of the assembly was introduced by Patriarch Parthenios of Alexandria and by Prof. Chung Hyun Kyung from Korea. It was a telling illustration of the richness of the ecumenical movement. Rooted in tradition, the presentation of the Patriarch was a testimony to the joyful free activity of the Holy Spirit. The fact that he could not be present physically was a powerful reminder of the tragic world situation. Prof. Chung's dramatic presentation was an exposition of new hope and dealt with the varied manifestations of the Spirit, both in the past and in the present, as peoples struggle to overcome oppression and injustice.

The challenge for the ecumenical movement is to bring all the varied understandings of the action of the Spirit into conversation and constructive dialogue. The heated debate which followed the two presentations concentrated on the issue of the action of the Spirit within and outside the church, and on the criteria necessary to recognize the presence of the Spirit. To this question belongs, of course, the question of who has the power to define the criteria, to discern the action of the Holy Spirit. This debate is not a new one in the life of the WCC. For example, in 1979 when the central committee meeting in Jamaica discussed the programme on a Just, Participatory and Sustainable Society, we could not find a bridge between a theology that recognized the "messianic character" of the people and one that focused on the classical expressions of the messianic role of Jesus Christ and the related understanding of the nature of the church. The classic theological dilemma returns now in the context of a *Trinitarian* approach which may help us to take further this crucial "dialogue of theologies and cultures".

Among the highlights of the assembly was our rich liturgical life with its enormous potential for spiritual renewal. Among them is also the re-entry into the WCC of the family of churches represented in the China Christian Council.

Among the questions that came up for serious discussion in the course of the assembly was one regarding the system of quotas and categories. That system was introduced to facilitate the participation of all in decision-making processes. Despite the evident benefits it has brought in some quarters, its effectiveness is now being called in question both in terms of the way it works and the erosion of memory and content it is said to entail.

These and many other issues are dealt with in depth in the articles included in this issue of *The Ecumenical Review*. The formal "results" of the assembly (the texts adopted or received in plenary, papers presented, a record of those present) will be published shortly. A foretaste of this material — the assembly Message and the reports from the Report and Programme Policy Committees — is given in the Chronicle section of this issue. Of the articles presented here the first two, written before the assembly, give an idea of the expectations that people had of Canberra. The others are about the assembly itself, its life and work. All the articles are by participants — delegates, observers, accredited visitors, stewards, co-opted press staff. A number of them were written during the last days of the assembly; others were sent to us soon

after the writers went back to their countries. We are grateful to all who have contributed to this interim assessment of Canberra.

*Interim*, because anything more than that is bound to take time and require a longer and larger perspective. It will depend on the programmes we draw up for the WCC in the light of the guidelines the assembly has given us. It will depend on how we build on the past without becoming slaves of the past. Our response to Canberra alone will bear out whether our prayer to the Holy Spirit is being answered.

EMILIO CASTRO

### **Erratum**

The cover of the January 1991 issue carried the wrong volume number. It should be Vol. 43. We apologize for this error.



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# Expectations around the Theme

*Mary Tanner*

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I want to offer four thoughts on the theme of the Canberra assembly: *Come, Holy Spirit — Renew the Whole Creation*. They may provide the beginnings of an overarching context against which to set and make sense of the four sub-themes. I hope too that these thoughts will show something of the vastness of the theme and of the need to keep the parts together, and that they will convey the urgency of the theme and, perhaps, point to its potential for a renewed ecumenical movement.

## **A prayer**

The *first* thing that strikes me is that, unlike any previous assembly theme, this is a prayer. We go to Canberra as a people of prayer. The assembly is not just to explore together the problems of our world or the divisions of the church, nor just to give an account of the past programmes and directions for future programmes of the WCC. We gather first of all as a praying community. This is not surprising to those of us who were at Vancouver and who remember, perhaps more vividly than anything else, our praying together in that great tent of meeting, with the heart of the worship in the celebration of the eucharist — the Orthodox liturgy on the Feast of the Transfiguration and the Lima liturgy presided over by the Archbishop of Canterbury flanked by ministers of other churches standing together with him at the altar. We go to Canberra, praying to God, through Christ in the power of the Holy Spirit. And as each of us goes praying “Come, Holy Spirit”, we are joined by that same Spirit to all who pray, by the power of the same Holy Spirit at work in them. As a praying assembly we are those already bonded together by the Holy Spirit — however sharp our ecclesiological divisions and disunities may be. We are united in prayer and we discover a deeper level of unity and communion, which transcends and will shame us into a new sense of our ecclesial disunities.

Another thing that strikes me about going to Canberra as a praying people is that because our theme is couched in the language of prayer it gives an urgency to it beyond that conveyed in a mere statement to be explored. For we go praying not just that the

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Lord will be with us, that we shall discover God together in that place. We go praying passionately that God's Spirit, the Holy Spirit, will renew creation — the whole creation. It is a theme born out of the urgency of our times. And it is a prayer of expectant trust and belief that God will do something — with us and in us, in our universe.

### **A Spirit-filled theme**

The *second* thing that strikes me about the theme is that for the first time it is a Spirit-theme. The earlier themes have been mostly Christological. The theme of Canberra marks a new departure. It is a theme directed to the Spirit. Of course we can't separate the work of the Holy Spirit from the other persons of the Holy Trinity. All theology of the Holy Spirit must be placed within the context of Trinitarian theology. In all acts of God — in creation, in redemption, in consummation — all three persons of the Holy Trinity are involved and always operate inseparably in a unity of persons, although each acts in a different and distinctive manner. The creation itself is the work of the Father, through his Word and his Spirit — the two hands of God as Irenaeus called them. Or, as Proverbs 8 so beautifully and poetically describes, the Woman Wisdom was there with God at creation, his master-craftsman, delighting in creative activity and herself the object of God's delighting. Creation is not an act of an isolated person, there is a communion of joy in creation.

So whatever the Holy Spirit does is integrally bound up with what the other persons of the Holy Trinity are doing. The Spirit-filled theme of Canberra has to be kept within the Trinitarian theology. Separated from it, we are in danger of a sub-Christian spiritualism, mere emotionalism run riot and not an authentic epiphany of the Holy Spirit. For such an epiphany only comes through the indivisible working of the three persons of the Trinity.

This choice of a pneumatological and Trinitarian theme has undoubtedly been greatly influenced by the strong and growing Orthodox perspectives at work in the WCC. Many of us were moved by the lovely meditation on the Rublev icon in Vancouver and the gentle and haunting presence of that famous Trinitarian icon in the tent of meeting, reminding us of the giving and receiving, receiving and giving of life and love that flow between the three persons of the Godhead ever open to one another, inseparable in all their activity and being.

But what strikes me even more about this Spirit theme is the close link between the Holy Spirit and creation in a new way. The Holy Spirit didn't first take the stage at Pentecost, released after the resurrection and ascension of Jesus Christ. In the very first page of the Hebrew scriptures, even before creation by God's word, the Spirit, the *ru'ah*, hovers to and fro on the face of the deep. And when God speaks the creative word it is by breath, by the Spirit, that the word is uttered and life comes to be. Thus the Word and the Spirit are intimately linked in a communion of creative work.

In our thinking and indeed in our credal profession, we tend to reserve creation as an act of God the Father and obscure the co-working of the Word and the Spirit in such a way that a wedge is driven between the Creator and the creation. We emphasize a distance between God and creation, the transcendent God over against creation.

The Canberra theme, by bringing together the Holy Spirit and creation, points to the immanence of God the Creator Spirit in the created world — in ourselves and in the universe. It is a theme the Old Testament Wisdom writers were captivated by, those



men (and women, like the wise woman of Tekoa) who were passionately interested in the way the world is, who like early scientists observed in great detail the world of nature, the ant, the hippopotamus, the crocodile, the rainbow, “miracles of ingenuity”, and whose penetrating observation told them: “Behind all of this is more than meets the eye.” Behind this is wisdom woven into the very fabric of the created world, that same wisdom, woman-like, that was with God when boundaries were set to the world. By Word and by Spirit the Creator actively imparts Godliness to his creation and enters into it:

O Lord who lovest the living,  
Thy immortal Spirit is in all things.

And most of us know something of what the Wisdom writers were saying when they looked around and saw God’s wisdom delightfully shot through creation. We can point to special moments, graced moments, moments of disclosure when, so it seems, the world is a window into a Divine Wisdom behind the universe, when we have sensed there is more than chance in it all. As Elizabeth Jennings says:

I see for one crammed second, order  
so explicit that I need no more persuasion.

Or, as John Taylor in *The Go-Between God* writes, the Holy Spirit is “the go-between” in relations between people and between humanity and nature. When we see, for example, a person or a landscape in a new way then they come to life, they become a presence towards which we surrender ourselves.

I have been impressed in my reading of John Polkinghorne, a theoretical physicist turned priest, who sees in the complexity of his strange invisible world of “quarks” and “gluons” that hold them together, such beauty, intelligibility and potentiality. He finds the work of the Spirit within the process of the enduring universe so that the creator God is not just the one who winds up the clock and lets it tick away, but a God who is on the inside of creation. So the discernment of the Holy Spirit is not only through aesthetic appreciation of the wonders of the world and the universe but also the intellectual understanding of the world gained through natural science. Modern physical theory is consonant with theological discourse on the Spirit; the Holy Spirit at work in creation, patiently, subtly, but none the less as certainly as was glimpsed by the Wisdom writers.

The Holy Spirit to whom we direct our prayer was there at the beginning in creation and there in the continuing process of the universe, making known to us the Divine Wisdom behind the universe. This is the Spirit who gives life, without whom there would be no life. It is that same Spirit that breathed life into the dead bones of Ezekiel’s valley of bones; the same Spirit that breathes life into the despairing disciples at Pentecost; the same Spirit we look to in Canberra for new life.

### **Amidst ambiguities and contradictions**

This leads me to my *third* point. We, with the Wisdom writers, with poets, artists and theologians, know what it is to glimpse the Holy Spirit at work in the good things of ourselves and our relationships, and in the good things of creation. But these moments are always challenged, seemingly contradicted, by the precariousness, the fragility of it all, by so much ambiguity, by the dark side of ourselves, our

relationships, and the dark and destructive side built into the creation and, more than ever, so it seems, worked by us. If Canberra does nothing else it will make us aware of that dark side, of the threat facing the world. In this *World Council of Churches* we shall be made aware in an uncomfortable way of the terrible ambiguities of our world:

- the obscene build-up of armaments dealing in the politics of death;
- the effects of nuclear testing, the storing and dumping of nuclear waste, leading to pregnancies that end in hardly recognizable human life and islands declared unfit for human habitation;
- the production and sale of arms that deliberately maintain conflict and political instability;
- the use of the advantages of technology to get more and more out of the earth for quick and selfish ends, polluting the air, the sea, laying waste whole tracts of land, assigning the powerless to lives of sickness and death, being blind to the needs of the next generation;
- the exploitative imbalances in international trade and the transnational corporations that seduce the poor, robbing them of the little they have and killing the economic growth of poor nations;
- the disfiguring of the earth by a consumerist life-style that devastates the biosphere and kills the gift of life;
- the manipulation of life in genetic engineering and biotechnology;
- the stories of the interweaving of sexism, racism and classism in tourism and prostitution.

And if all this sounds like a list of slogans we shall find in Canberra, if Canberra is going to be like Vancouver, then there is a force and an immediacy about them precisely because they are carried in the experience of the people who are eating and living and praying with us:

- in Desmond Tutu telling of apartheid;
- in a woman called Darlene telling of her pregnancy which led to a “jelly fish baby”;
- in Bishop Servitiu’s story of the children dying in the hospitals of Romania;
- in Christians in the Middle East faced with the build-up of arms and daily fear of war;
- and in the stories of the indigenous peoples, of the robbing of their land, and attacks on their self-respect.

And in private conversations on the edge of the campus we shall hear individuals talking of their personal stories of brokenness: of a wife slowly dying of cancer; of a brain-damaged daughter; of a young German who fears himself subject internally to the same evil that led some of his fellow countrymen to acts of extreme and obscene cruelty.

There is no doubt we shall be made aware in Canberra of the darkness of ourselves and of our world and of our universe. Some of us will be sickened, angered, frustrated; some will protest that we didn’t come to a WCC meeting to hear such things and will turn away. And that brings me to my *fourth* point.

It is in the midst of this, in the midst of the ambiguity of creation, in the midst of the realization of the destructiveness, in the midst of the feeling that the world is running out of control, that we must pray with urgency: *Come, Holy Spirit — Renew the Whole Creation*. But I hope we shall come to understand it as a twofold cry. First of all (and



this is *not* to prioritize) an urgent cry against the progressive destruction by women and men of nature, and of one another and of themselves. It *is* a cry for the transforming, life-giving Spirit to work in us and among us, urging us to seek the way of peace, the way of justice (and without justice there can be no peace; if South Africa has taught us anything it has driven this home), urging us to become more faithful stewards of creation. We are to an increasing extent changing the face of the earth. That is what makes us so dominant and so dangerous. But even as we are filled with the capacity and the propensity to do evil, we are also capable, with the Holy Spirit's power, to work for healing and mending. We can use technology not for destructive ends but to sustain the fast-growing population of the world. We can learn to value and care for the natural world and its inhabitants for their own sakes, because they are what God made them, and because they reveal the wisdom and magnificence of God. We are capable of respecting and honouring the integrity of creation. And as Christians we need to show the way and take the lead.

So our prayer is a prayer for us to cooperate with the Holy Spirit and to lead the way in living and working on the side of God's creation, working for justice, peace and the integrity of creation. Canberra will be a time and a place for us to reaffirm through the Holy Spirit our responsibility for the integrity of creation, our intention to respect the life of all creatures, and for us to get hold at a deeper level of the responsibility that goes with being women and men created in the image and likeness of God, entrusted with the stewardship of God's creation and of the Spirit's work in creation.

But to leave it there in Canberra, at the level of the JPIC programme with all its marvellous insights and promises, hardly yet glimpsed in the Christian community, would be in danger of Canberra becoming a cacophony of disparate hopes, of turning the assembly into a "jousting place" for a motley of special interests, each invoking the Spirit's blessing and intervention issuing in a series of special resolutions on nuclear war, Aboriginal rights, rights of the old, the women, the young, the resolutions to cancel national debts, etc. We should be in danger of paying lip service to the Holy Spirit in claiming support for our disparate cultural and political enthusiasms.

### **An eschatological cry**

The prayer "Come, Holy Spirit — Renew the Whole Creation" is a prayer of course for all of this. We must pray it with confidence and our prayer must issue in life, because the creation and our relationships with one another and with the natural world are the place where the Spirit dwells and is present to us. But the prayer is much more than this. It is above all an eschatological prayer, an eschatological cry. It is both a cry for personal liberation from our inhumanity and our selfish domination of the universe and a cry for liberation from time and from death. Even apart from pollution, the exploitation of nature, the creation is subject to futility and the bondage of decay; "it groans in travail". It took 15 billion years, so the scientists tell us, to reach that point in time. Even if many more billions of years are left, one thing is sure, we are told: the universe will end, either flying apart forever and decaying, or falling in upon itself and collapsing. The balance between the expansive and contractive forces is too fine for certainty, but either way the end is bleak.

The whole of creation has to be reborn out of the power of time and the dominion of death into eternal life. The first creation was *ex nihilo*, the new creation for which we pray is *ex vetero*. We reach through this creation to the new and that is why we are to

care for its integrity and to search for its meaning and affirm its potential. But the old creation, we ourselves, apart from the Holy Spirit, have no capacity for eternal life. If there is any legitimate hope for ourselves and our world it is in relation to God the Creator, in relation to God the Word who became created and suffered with us, and in relation to God the Holy Spirit who gives life. And the clue to our hope, the surety of our hope lies in the life, death, and above all in the conquering resurrection of Christ. Here is the firstborn from the dead, here is the first day of the new creation, and the same Holy Spirit who raised Jesus from the dead is the one who will raise us and transform us. We and the whole of the created universe have to be reborn out of the power of time, out of the bondage of death into incorruptible and eternal life.

This is the renewal we pray for ultimately in our prayer to the Holy Spirit. The prayer for justice, peace and the integrity of creation is the cry *in via*. But linked inseparably to it is the eschatological cry. We have a glimpse of what this eschatological cry means as we look back at the resurrection of Christ, as we experience those moments described in *The Go-Between God*, in relations with others and in nature, moments when we know and are grasped by and caught up in a relationship of giving and receiving that new life in the sacramental signs God gives to the church: in the cleansing water of baptism; in the coming of God's real presence in the eucharistic bread and wine through the life-giving power of the Holy Spirit. The present work of the Holy Spirit in the communion of the church is the first-fruits of that new life to come. The sacraments are pledges of that life, the future in advance. In them we glimpse the transformation of ourselves and the transformation of the universe made completely the way God is with us, no longer hidden but made manifest.

We believe that the resurrection life of Christ and the resurrection life of Christians, and indeed of the universe, belong to a single process, instituted and sustained by the Holy Spirit. This mysterious mode of new life demanded by the resurrection is itself spiritual (1 Cor. 15:44). Transformation through sharing in the resurrection of Christ is the key to hope. The Spirit has begun the process already in Christ, in and through this world. Our prayer at Canberra looks to the final decisive event, when the Holy Spirit will transform the mode of existence — of ourselves and of the universe. Into this new arena of existence will be absorbed qualities of the present creation transformed and transfigured. We can only talk of it in pictures, like the transforming vision of St John. The New Jerusalem is prepared as a bride beautifully adorned for her husband. A great voice says that God dwells with God's people — God wipes away every tear, death is no more, there is no more crying and no more pain. It is easier to say what it is not than what it is. It is the Lamb — the crucified Lamb who has shared our pain and death — who declares: "Behold, I make all things new."

So "Come, Holy Spirit — Renew the Whole Creation" is a prayer for us to live in a new way within this old creation, faithful to our God-given stewardship. But it must not remain a prayer simply for justice and peace and the integrity of creation in this world — but extend to the coming of the eschatological kingdom. Only in this way will it be a prayer of hope and of triumph in the face of the despair of our world and the failure of ourselves and of our relationships.

These then are the *four* things that strike me about the Canberra theme:

- it is first and foremost a prayer;
- it is oriented to the Holy Spirit, inseparable from the Trinitarian life and love of God;



- it is uttered by us in the midst of the ambiguities of ourselves and our world;
- it is a prayer with a double yet interlocking reference for God's creation here and now and, through that, for a transformed new creation.

My final thought is that those of us who prepare to pray this prayer at Canberra must be open to receive the gifts the Holy Spirit will give us there:

- in and through our waiting on each other — waiting upon those who are bearers of the Holy Spirit, and ready to genuflect to each other as carriers of God's Holy Spirit;
- ready to receive the Holy Spirit through the witness and experience of others;
- ready to seek for signs of the Holy Spirit in the life of the churches, and in the world ahead of us.

If we go in prayer, open to receive, it just might be that Canberra will open up a new chapter in the ecumenical movement.

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# A Renewed Ecumenical Movement

*Ans van der Bent*

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## I

The World Council of Churches has from its inception in 1948 been called a “privileged instrument” of the ecumenical movement and the “avant garde” of ecumenical programmes and activities. Its three constituent movements, Mission and Evangelism (from 1910), Faith and Order (from 1927), and Life and Work (from 1925) had indeed been engaged in pioneering work. The first two of these movements generated, already within the first two decades of the WCC’s existence, an impressive list of studies which were debated at WCC assemblies and major conferences. The Council at that point was thoroughly Christologically oriented. The WCC’s member churches in all their diversity discovered and affirmed that they formed a single community in Jesus Christ.

It was particularly W.A. Visser ’t Hooft, the first general secretary of the WCC, who emphasized the being and mission of the church as squarely within God’s design for the salvation of the world. In his book *The Pressure of Our Common Calling*, he dealt with all major ecumenical concerns within the framework of one single vision. Equal attention was given to matters of faith and order, mission and evangelism, and church and society. Distinguishing four different meanings of unity — the given unity of the common calling; the growing unity in fulfilling the common calling; the church unity in faith and order; the ultimate unity in Christ — he described them in relation to the nature and the task of the ecumenical movement.<sup>1</sup>

It is important to note that ecumenical social ethics was also rooted in a Christological vision. In *The Kingship of Christ*, Visser ’t Hooft stated that “the doctrine of the present Kingship of Christ over the world provides the basis for a social gospel which is truly a gospel... We do not need to choose between an exclusively priestly witness which announces only the forgiveness of sins and has no place for the law of God and an exclusively prophetic witness which preaches the law but does not offer the gift of grace. We have a priestly and prophetic King... We do not need to be assured that the Gospel ‘works’. The one all-important thing is to be with the King and to obey him.”<sup>2</sup>

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● The Rev. Ans van der Bent, now retired, was director of the WCC Library, and later WCC ecumenical research officer. A member of the United Church of Christ, he was a guest at Canberra.



Visser 't Hooft's conviction that the Bible "does give us the basic insights concerning God's design for society ...[and the tools] to arrive at Christian decisions in these realms" was widely shared by other ecumenical leaders.<sup>3</sup> It was the basis of the WCC's prophetic voice addressed to the first and second world, then deeply divided in the cold war, and to the third world, then struggling desperately for independence, development and dignity. In his report presented at the New Delhi assembly in 1961, Visser 't Hooft stated explicitly that all ecumenism that is worthy of the name is a movement of concentration, a return to the sources, or still better a return to the *centre*. The ecumenical movement is Christocentric, otherwise it cannot exist at all.<sup>4</sup>

## II

A considerable shift of emphasis began in the mid-sixties. The world conference on Church and Society (Geneva, 1966) concentrated on such specific issues as the world economic order, development, responsible participation in political life, and structures of international cooperation. The WCC Uppsala assembly in 1968 faced the growing gap between rich and poor nations, the disastrous effects of racism, the ambiguity of new scientific and technological discoveries, the tensions between generations.

From 1968 the most characteristic feature of ecumenical social work has been its orientation on action, in contrast to the emphasis on study and "persuasion" during the years 1948-68. There was a clear shift from the universal to the contextual approach, from an analysis of critical situations to a stress on people's involvement in ongoing struggles. In the first phase the primary concerns were freedom and order; in the second the central notion became justice in its economic, social and (increasingly) political dimensions. The concern for freedom was now expressed in terms of human rights and human dignity.

Not surprisingly the Vancouver assembly in 1983 recommended that the engagement of "member churches in a conciliar process of mutual commitment (covenant) to justice, peace and the integrity of all creation should be a priority for World Council programmes".<sup>5</sup> Sadly — but predictably — the world convocation on Justice, Peace and the Integrity of Creation in Seoul (March 1990) did not meet the high expectations the process had given rise to. It lacked content and its impact was fragmented.

Such concerns were perhaps more in the "ecumenical headlines" since 1968 than the issues of church unity and mission and evangelism. But this did not prevent important efforts, which met with some success, in the areas of unity and mission.

The Faith and Order Commission has become widely known through the 1982 text *Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry*, its often major studies, and its work on needs of unity. Yet a whole series of theological problems remain unresolved and a polarization between "ecclesiastical" and "secular" ecumenism remains. No adequate answer has been given as to how the ecclesiological significance of the WCC relates to the proposed "conciliar process" on justice, peace and the integrity of creation. BEM has not overcome the differences between the emphasis on a priestly/sacramental and a prophetic/missionary concept of the church, nor has it shown sufficiently that church unity can never be an end in itself but is destined by God to be a means for the renewal of humanity. The "consensus" Lima document has, despite its own intention, contributed to an even greater focus on the clergy and on church structures in the

ecumenical movement, with the role and importance of the laity not sufficiently emphasized.

The problem of church unity is now seen — after more than forty years of experience and labour — as much more complicated than originally anticipated. The old ecumenical ideal cannot be restored simply by ever-greater efforts to solve the traditional conflicts; today we face new conflicts, which require a fresh start, a new goal and a new vision. The Vancouver assembly called us to grow towards a “vital and coherent” theology, but the search for this had to be abandoned because of confusion and indecisiveness. Such a new vision is possible only if the healing of the nations is recognized as a prerequisite — and not just an appendix — of our ecumenical endeavours.

The Commission on World Mission and Evangelism has been wrestling with the meaning, scope and goal of mission as a proclaiming of the good news in convincing word and costly deed to the poor, and as liberation of the oppressed. The overcrowded and ecologically threatened global village cries out for mission as the word of judgment and the promise of justice by the Lord of history, revealed in the incarnate, crucified and risen Christ. Evangelism in its inner core is eschatological; it challenges persons individually and collectively to encounter their Creator, Judge and Redeemer, who will fulfill history according to the divine purpose.

But these insights have not solved the problems of the inter-relationship of mission and unity, and mission and dialogue. As for the first issue, apparently the WCC and its constituency, despite affirmations that mission and unity belong together, still have not learned that the integrity of mission has to be derived from Christian unity and the integrity of unity has to be based on the very practice of mission.

With regard to the issue of linking mission and dialogue, a minority of ecumenical voices has begun to challenge the predominant attitude of twentieth-century Christians, who see little or no faith value in other religions and insist that a mainly mission-oriented theology of religions remains valid. A major stream within both the Nairobi (1975) and Vancouver (1983) assemblies rejected the possibility of God’s presence and activity in the life of people of other faiths. The San Antonio mission conference (1989) dared finally to open a few windows, though its statements still do not imply that a radical reappraisal of the missionary movement’s working hypothesis of God’s relation to people of other living faiths is now set in motion.

Difficult theological questions remain to be answered, such as those recently asked: “... does God’s self-revelation take place in nature, in all human history, and in human experience? Or does [divine revelation happen] only through the specific historical experience of a people within one stream of history?”<sup>6</sup> Such questions should not be faced only by a few “experts” in the field of dialogue; the whole World Council is challenged to tackle them. So far, however, WCC assemblies and meetings of the central committee have been deeply divided on these issues and on the proper theological basis for our relation as Christians to persons of other faiths. Even less do the majority of WCC member churches wish to explore a pluralistic theology of religious and secular convictions which would shed new light on their inner motivation and central outlook.

Many voices in the World Council’s constituency continue to claim that the Council’s main task is to put its own house in order. Only when a truly “conciliar fellowship” agreed on matters of unity, mission and service has been established, it is



asserted, will the world Christian community be able to enter more fully into interfaith dialogue and to develop in greater depth a pluralistic theology of religions. Another argument is that Christians should not overstate the importance of dialogue since the majority of other believers show no inclination to engage freely in interfaith encounters. Finally it is said that the Bible provides no clear indication as to why and how the Christian community should become the initiator and promoter of multifaith relationships.

### III

The fact that a basic “paradigm shift” is taking place in the ecumenical movement is by no means a tentative theory or a mere supposition. There are many signs that the ecumenism of earlier decades has been overtaken by history. The questions being asked about the WCC’s identity and role within the ecumenical movement cannot be answered in the terms of the 1950s. The renewal of the WCC cannot come simply by rethinking its aims and functions and by rearranging its programmes. A comprehensive and realistic analysis of the entire ecumenical situation is necessary.

Such an analysis and critique of the present situation is already under way. Some voices claim that the earlier Christocentric universalism led inevitably to a crypto-triumphalism, and that the Christology “from the top” needs to be replaced by a Christology “from below”: the powerless cross is more powerful than the world’s powers and principalities. Others have called increasingly for a clearer Trinitarian perspective in the basis of the WCC.

A new orientation for the Council may well emerge through the deliberations of its seventh assembly. Its main theme, “Come, Holy Spirit — Renew the Whole Creation”, opens up new vistas. The Holy Spirit works in ways that pass human understanding. The Bible testifies to the Trinitarian God as sovereign over all nations and peoples. God’s love and compassion include every human being. It is the Spirit who groans with all believers — and the whole creation — in their brokenness “with sighs too deep for words”, even as they long for the whole creation to “be set free from bondage to decay” so that they may share in the “glorious freedom of the children of God”. In the final consummation the whole creation is to be reconciled to God in Christ through the Holy Spirit.

The Canberra assembly could indicate a new way forward for the ecumenical movement through recognizing and practising its fundamental *dialogical* dimension and its fundamental *solidarity* with God’s world. Here Hans Küng is certainly right in linking a theology “ad intra” to a theology “ad extra”.

A fully developed doctrine of the Trinity supports such a new perspective and approach. It expresses the mutuality of indwelling whereby the love of God passes and passes without ceasing among the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. Such fullness of differentiated personal Being is the nearest approach that the human mind and heart can make to the ineffable mystery of God. It has deep implications both for the present-day world in “all its ambivalence, contingency, and changeableness” and for the ecumenical movement, divided as it is between the concerns of unity, witness and service, each pursued and promoted by distinctive constituencies and institutional structures.

## IV

It has become clear that the phrase “dialogue with people of other living faiths and ideologies”, coined in the early seventies, has far deeper implications than was expected. Dialogue cannot be just a concern of one of the sixteen sub-units of the WCC. Facing the fact that world society has become permanently pluriform, a valid theology of religions must wrestle with the possibility that the Trinitarian God has more than one “history”, that God is participant not only in Jewish and Christian history but also somehow in Hindu and Muslim history. Here the word “participant” should be stressed because it is inadequate simply to affirm God’s providential surveillance of all world history. God’s active involvement in peoples’ histories, perhaps even their “salvation histories”, must be affirmed.

In this context the question of the nature of the church’s unity, the question of the nature of proclaiming the Christ who died and rose again, and the question of the nature of this world where all people are pilgrims and temporary dwellers take on new meaning and become intimately related to one another. The presently-divided “programmes” of the ecumenical movement are urged now to break out of their particular departmental cocoons and move towards God’s ecumenical horizon where the cross of Christ beckons.

When the church and the world are seen in both their difference and their reciprocal belonging, the present recalcitrant elements within ecclesiology will become forward-looking, open and hospitable. Especially the sacraments will truly reveal what the world will become. In breaking down barriers between races, classes and sexes, they have implications not just for the Christian community but for all humankind.

Similarly the church’s prophetic and missionary task is freed to see salvation at work in all struggles for justice, human dignity and peace. The community of the Christ which suffers for his kingdom is extended throughout humanity. The world church is freed from the temptation to become only a vast international Christian ghetto, so that the ecumenical movement can relate responsibly to the stories of religions, cultures and peoples and be in permanent dialogue with them.

## V

In spite of sensing that a “paradigm shift” is occurring, and in spite of emphasizing the need to develop a much deeper and more inclusive Trinitarian perspective, the World Council still finds considerable difficulty in restructuring its programmes and activities. New structural models have been proposed and rejected during the last few years. It sometimes seems that the Council cannot do more than rearrange its “ecumenical furniture” and remain faithful to the successful parts of its past. The danger is that the fundamental focii of the WCC — Faith and Order, Church and Society, and Mission and Evangelism — will remain divided and pursue different goals, even if a new effort is made to reformulate their respective tasks and to relate them more ingeniously to one another.

Church structures, including ecumenical structures, are, of course, provisional and relative, as are all the structures of this world. A new vision expressed in new structures could lead to new mandates and programmes in areas such as gospel and



humanity, gospel and conscientization, gospel, dialogue and mission, gospel and world service, gospel and church unity. The gospel, the common term among them, not only indicates an awareness of ever-new ecumenical responsibilities; it holds them all together in one meaningful whole.

The ecumenical message to the churches is that Jesus Christ wants to save the entire creation, that he urges his disciples to know the width and the depth of their salvation, that he is their supreme master in dialogue and witness, that he invites them to serve him in all their neighbours in order that the quality of being one in him and through him, becomes transparent in all human desires for intimate communion.

Thus we need to rediscover the divinely-blessed "twofold identity" of the church. It is not just a human association, a historical result of Jesus' ministry, but an embodiment of God's real and saving sacramental presence within humanity. Yet at the same time it is still a provisional community, not fully reconciled among its members and embracing only a part of the human family within its life. It is precisely this double identity which makes the church a "privileged instrument" of dialogue and solidarity with the multi-cultural, multi-religious and multi-ideological world. It is precisely in dialogue and solidarity with this pluralistic world that its message of costly reconciliation will become credible and its peculiar identity will be enriched and confirmed.

We look forward to Canberra to set guidelines which will make possible a breakthrough along these lines.

#### NOTES

<sup>1</sup> W.A. Visser 't Hooft, *The Pressure of Our Common Calling*, New York, Doubleday, 1959, pp.87-90.

<sup>2</sup> W.A. Visser 't Hooft, *The Kingship of Christ*, London, SCM, 1948, pp.95 and 97.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>4</sup> W.A. Visser 't Hooft, "The Calling of the World Council of Churches", in *The Ecumenical Review*, Vol. 14, No. 2, 1962, pp.216-26.

<sup>5</sup> *Gathered for Life*, official report of the sixth assembly, Vancouver, 24 July-10 August 1983, ed. David Gill, Geneva, WCC, 1983, p.255.

<sup>6</sup> S. Wesley Ariarajah, "Theological Perspectives on Plurality", in *Current Dialogue*, No. 18, June 1990, p.2.

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# “Come, Holy Spirit!” — And We Really Mean “Come!”

*Robin Boyd*

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## **A movement once again!**

That first day of the Canberra assembly was wonderful: so many reunions with friends whom I had not seen for years — friends from India, Ireland, Britain, Europe, America, as well as Australia. So many of them with exciting ecumenical stories to tell: so many of them, too, with shared memories of conferences in the heady days of the Student Christian Movement (SCM), in which my ecumenical conversion occurred.

I had been fortunate enough to be involved — for ten days prior to the assembly — in an international course on ecumenics for theological students, organized by the Australian and New Zealand Association of Theological Schools, which brought together ninety people, mainly young, from Australia, New Zealand, the Pacific, Indonesia, Malaysia, Korea, India, Canada and the United States. At that course a succession of teachers — Davis McCaughey, Paul Abrecht, Paul Crow, T.V. Philip, Michael Kinnamon, John Chryssavgis, Janet Crawford — had made clear, without prior consultation, the missionary and student origins of the modern ecumenical movement. And those who had been part of that movement recalled that the whole methodology of the WCC — its worship, its singing, its Bible study, its section meetings and plenaries and reports — derives, for better or worse, from the methodology of the SCM, which bequeathed it to the 1910 Edinburgh conference and all subsequent ecumenical meetings. Father Michael Putney, one of the Roman Catholic observers at Canberra, had brought the history up to date with the story of the Roman Catholic Church’s developing involvement in modern ecumenism — a story reinforced for us by the fact that we were meeting and living in the Blackfriars Dominican Retreat Centre.

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● The Rev. Dr Robin Boyd, of the Uniting Church of Australia’s Wesley Central Mission, was an accredited visitor at the assembly.



At the end of that crash-course in ecumenics, something happened which moved me deeply. In a feedback session, a student said: “Why can’t we have a conference like this every year, or at least once in every theological student’s seminary career?” It was a request, heartily backed by all the students, to rediscover the atmosphere, the dynamic, of those theological students’ conferences which were such a stimulating part of the life of the SCM — certainly in Britain and Ireland — in the 1940s and 1950s, and which provided a cadre of leaders in the ecumenical movement in the decades to follow.

### **Young people as pace-setters**

In that period, it was the student world which set the pace for the ecumenical movement. The SCM and its international arm, the World Student Christian Federation (WSCF), were not “official”: yet the churches listened to what the students and their leaders had to say. There was a sensitivity to the voice of these young people, who were committed to, yet not controlled by, the churches. In those days young people did not have to struggle to make their voice heard in the ecumenical movement: they *were* the ecumenical movement. Today things are very different: yet, as the Canberra assembly developed, the voice of young people came more and more to be heard.

It was heard in the assembly’s decision to allocate one of the presidential seats to a young person under thirty. It was heard in the moving appeal of the youthful Prof. Chung Hyun Kung of Korea that the church, after 2000 years, should at last listen to the voice of someone young, and female, and not from the West. As I shall indicate later, I have reservations about some of Prof. Chung’s views, but to this *cri du coeur* I would give all my support.

And the voice of young people was heard most clearly in the response of youth delegates and students to the dismal spectacle of the assembly’s wrangling over nominations to the central committee. With a large banner proclaiming the WCC’s impending “ecumenical suicide” if youth were relegated to the margins of its life, they claimed a twenty percent participation in the central committee. The assembly found it a somewhat embarrassing occasion: I believe that the young people were fully justified in their action, and that unless their participation in the WCC is radically increased, it will not have much future. But I also believe that more is needed than an increased number of “slots” in the structure where young people can be fitted in: what is needed is the revival of a real “movement” among young people, fired by the inner dynamic of the Holy Spirit. Prof. Chung’s appeal from Korea reminded me that the real beginning of the modern ecumenical movement was the initiative of a group of Asian students meeting in Japan almost a hundred years ago, who sent to their counterparts in the United States the famous telegram: “Make Jesus King.” Our ecumenical structures have developed greatly since then: but have we lost a primary source of the movement’s dynamic? By the end of the Canberra assembly I was beginning to experience a renewal of hope.

### **A door into heaven — almost!**

As at Vancouver, the assembly’s worship was for me, and for many others, one of its best features. At the Blackfriars Priory in a northern suburb of Canberra, we got up at 6 every morning to make sure of being in the great worship tent in good time — not

just for the 7.45 a.m. worship, but for the 7.15 a.m. singing rehearsal. The seven musical “animateurs” — from all over the world — were perhaps the assembly’s most popular figures, and Babel was daily displaced by Pentecost. Memorable too was the use of striking symbols — fire-blackened bushes once more green with regenerating life, sackcloth and ashes on Ash Wednesday, the visceral, heart-wrenching vibration of the didgeridoo calling us to worship. And yet the pain of separation at the point of communion was palpable, especially at the Orthodox liturgy of St Chrysostom, when John Chryssavgis in sadness had to announce that communion was limited to the Orthodox, and that wonderful “door into heaven”, which for a moment had been opened by the dazzling liturgy and the time-annihilating reading of the gospel in Greek, was firmly shut, with most of us on the wrong side.

At our pre-assembly students’ course we decided — after much heart-searching — to avoid the pain by *not* celebrating any eucharist, but instead sharing an *agape* meal together. It was not a eucharist: it was a meal. But we ate bread, and we drank wine, and we remembered our Lord’s death, and we shared in koinonia. And one of the students asked me: “Whom do we think we are kidding?”

### **Eucharistic hospitality**

Can anything be done about this situation? Well, the assembly expressed the hope that it can — if not with the Orthodox, then at least between Roman Catholics and other Christians. The report on *The Unity of the Church as Koinonia: Gift and Calling* calls on all the churches “on the basis of convergence in faith in baptism, eucharist and ministry, to consider, where appropriate, forms of eucharistic hospitality”.

I would strongly appeal to my Roman Catholic colleagues to encourage the more frequent offer of eucharistic hospitality, in all those cases where it is already possible for permission to be given. My experience is that bishops and clergy are reluctant to grant permission for non-Catholics to communicate, in many instances when to do so would be quite possible. And I believe that the effort should be made to inform bishops and clergy, as well as the laity, of the extent to which such hospitality can be granted. The widespread eucharistic hospitality extended by Anglicans to Christians of other churches has not indeed led to full intercommunion: but it has greatly extended the possibility of Christian koinonia. I would suggest that the application of maximum freedom to interchurch couples — whom we all agree to have become “one flesh” through marriage — and to participants in conferences seriously directed towards Christian unity, should be given immediate priority. The re-examination, in this context, of the principle of “economy” could radically change the whole atmosphere of the discussion on intercommunion. That happened with Anglicans and the main Protestant churches thirty years ago: it would be wonderful if it could happen between Roman Catholics, Anglicans and Protestants today.

### **Rescuing syncretism — the criteria**

For me, as for many participants, the most challenging issue at the assembly was in the field of interfaith dialogue. The debate revolved mainly around Prof. Chung’s dramatic presentation — in music, dance, and the spoken word — of the power of the Spirit. A controversy arose out of this presentation, in which Prof. Chung’s main — but by no means only — opponents were Orthodox theologians, who felt that the



presentation was a glaring example of syncretism, in which Christianity was being paganized rather than culture being Christianized.

As one who spent many years in the attempt to interpret Christian theology in the Indian (Hindu) cultural context, I find myself sympathetic to the aim of Prof. Chung's presentation. At two points, however, I felt uneasy. First in the scenario of the invocation of the spirits of those who had died as martyrs or as innocent victims of violence: I wanted to interpret this in terms of the communion of saints rather than in terms reminiscent of Endor and the calling up of Samuel's spirit for Saul, but I found it difficult to do so. And secondly I was disturbed by the use of terms and names from the Korean spirit-world — Han and Kwan In — in what seems to be an implied identification with the Holy Spirit. Illustrations and “images”, certainly. Perhaps even “icons” of the Spirit. But is Prof Chung going further than this? I believe that we need to establish, or confirm, criteria for the use of terms from cultural backgrounds related to other faiths. In India, for example, most Christians would agree that one can use terms like *Isvara* or even *Bhagavan* for God: but proper names like Krishna or Shiva would be avoided, because they carry with them a burden of concepts which may be difficult to reconcile with Christian faith, and will at the best create confusion in people's minds.

Prof. Chung argued very movingly that her criterion for the use of particular terms and symbols was the pain and longing of the suffering, poor and exploited women of Korea. We must indeed honour such people, and respond to their agony, as we respond to the agony of Dietrich Bonhöffer, or of the psalmist who wrote: “Out of the depths have I cried to you, O Lord.” But when we cry from the depths, or when we listen to the cry of the poor and exploited, it is to the Spirit that we turn for help — the Spirit of Christ who said: “My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?”

The report of section IV is very helpful here. After affirming that “The Holy Spirit is at work among all peoples and faiths, and throughout the universe” it goes on to say:

Spirits must be discerned. Not every spirit is of the Holy Spirit. The primary criterion for discerning the Holy Spirit is that the Holy Spirit is the Spirit of Christ, points to the cross and resurrection and witnesses to the Lordship of Christ. The fruits of the Spirit, among them love, joy and peace, offer another criterion to be applied (Gal. 5:22). We believe that these criteria should also operate when we encounter the profound spirituality of other religions.

Syncretism — that effort to live and witness “among the Cretans” as the word literally implies — is quite legitimate so long as it is centred on Christology and the Trinity. But if the centre moves from that point, so that the enterprise becomes the justification of another culture (whether Korean, Hindu, Marxist, capitalist or humanist) then syncretism becomes dangerous and is to be rejected. I believe that Dr Chung's presentation *is* seeking to be Christocentric and Trinitarian; and that the criteria suggested in section IV give us the right clue in this controversial area.

### **A missionary people**

I must admit that I was afraid that Canberra might sell us short on the mission of the church, and one phrase from San Antonio (and *Mission and Evangelism: An Ecumenical Affirmation*) which I had hoped to hear again, did not make it into print — the affirmation that “Christians owe the message of God's salvation in Jesus Christ to every person and to every people”. Yet in the end there was much to give comfort and

hope to one who has never ceased to think of himself as a missionary, however debased that word — like “syncretism”! — may have become. The message affirms:

God and humankind are reconciled by the costly sacrifice that we see in the cross of Christ. Our appropriation of reconciliation and our acceptance of the ministry of reconciliation (2 Cor. 5:18) are also costly. Through our acceptance of the ministry of reconciliation, we become a missionary people, not in the sense of dominating over peoples and nations, which has all too often characterized missionary work, but in the sense of sharing God’s own mission of bringing all humanity into communion with God through Christ in the power of the Spirit, sharing our faith and our resources with all people.

Looking to the future, the programme policy report speaks of “a holistic evangelism”, which is in fact the kind of mission spelt out in all the material on justice, peace and the integrity of creation, together with the stress on indigenous peoples, on women’s issues, and on the place of young people in the church. The same document tells us that “a reconciled and renewed creation is the goal of the mission of the church”. That is good: and the section III report is even more specific. “The reconciled community that we seek can *only* be found through Jesus who laid down his life for his friends and forgave those who nailed him to the cross.” And then follows a whole series of memorable statements. “A reconciled and renewed creation is the goal of the mission of the church. The mission of God uniting all things in Christ is the driving force of its life and sharing.... We affirm that we are called to share the gospel among all peoples locally and globally... Our mission needs to be in Christ’s way, in full obedience to the will of God, as it was analyzed at the world mission conference in San Antonio... We need to remember our original understanding of mission which is preaching, teaching and healing... Evangelism is a vital part of mission and is the responsibility of all members of the church. ...Both the telling and the hearing of faith are crucial in discerning God’s will... Dialogue is an authentic form of Christian witness.”

Yes, I would have liked to see a higher profile for preaching (difficult when the distance between the worship tent and the conference centre made attendance at the mid-day preaching service impossible even for four-minute milers!) I would have liked a real exposition of the “holistic” meaning of the New Testament verb *euaggelizesthai* — to share the good news. But there is much to give hope for the future.

### **The essential advent**

The polyglot, wonderful songs we sang in the worship tent were largely about the coming of the Spirit. The *coming* of that Spirit was the assembly theme: not the “emerging” of a spirit already present in creation, or within us, waiting only for our realization of our identity with it. “Creator Spirit” — and we wait for that Spirit to come upon us, as upon Samson or the prophets, or the dry bones in Ezekiel’s valley: as upon Jesus at his baptism: as upon the church at Pentecost.

The Christian faith is bound up with *advents* — the advent of Christ, the advent of the Spirit. The Spirit is indeed at work in creation, and in women and men of other faiths. But the specific calling of the Christian church from the beginning has been to proclaim these advents — advent of Christ, advent of the Spirit — in forgiving, reconciling, recreating power. We cannot remain silent about these advents: we owe it to the world to tell the story. If we really believe in the importance of all our work for



“COME, HOLY SPIRIT!” — AND WE REALLY MEAN “COME!”

justice, peace and the integrity of creation, all our delight in worship, all our search for unity at the Lord’s table and in the ministry of the church, then surely we need to be ready to affirm in the public sphere the story of the good news of Christ and the Spirit. “Come, Holy Spirit!” And we really mean “Come!”

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# An Australian Assessment

*Margaret Rodgers*

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Australian churches and parishes had been *on line* for the WCC assembly for two or three years in many cases, and the event was eagerly prepared for and anticipated. Now the world church has visited us and returned home, and we are left to reflect on the experience, to accommodate to what we have learned, and to wonder if and where the assembly, and we ourselves, might have done better. This paper presents some Australian perspectives on the assembly, though admitting at the outset that any such attempt must inevitably contain subjective, individual impressions. Australians are fiercely individualistic and it would be a brave soul who would claim to speak for everyone. There were many Australians present, as delegates, visitors, observers, advisers and co-opted staff. Their comments and reports on the assembly are already appearing, and opinion is diverse, ranging from unmitigated enthusiasm, to qualified approval or guarded criticism, and even to overt hostility from a small minority.

We were conscious that many delegates from overseas found the heat of midsummer Canberra, and the walking from place to place around the campus of the Australian National University, a very trying experience. But the distance between each centre at the ANU and the heat and the dust were a kind of paradigm of life in Australia. We are used to moving through vast distances to meet each other, for if we do not cross our distances there can be no face-to-face meeting and we would be a very separate people. We are also used to dust and flies and bushfires on the hills in the summer. They are part of our life, and we shared them with our overseas friends, who did not always appreciate that gift we offered.

## **Anticipation and expectation**

What did we expect? Christians from all over the world, coming to shake us out of our insularity and to remind us that separation and distance do not exist in the body of Christ; the chance to meet notable Christian leaders whose writings had influenced us and whose courageous witness had inspired us; meeting old friends coming again to

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visit us and making new friendships. These we eagerly awaited, and in the experience of meeting and encounter we were not disappointed. This is a different kind of assembly from what happens on the platform, it is the assembly underneath the assembly. It is also the assembly which will linger and not be forgotten, long after the addresses, discussions and debate have fallen away into the silence.

We will also remember the uplifting quality of the worship, the international flavour of the hymnody and the infectious enthusiasm of the music facilitators. We may have wished for a homily to be preached every morning, but otherwise we will not forget the worshipping community at prayer in Canberra. The worship was the outstanding feature of the assembly.

### **Some notes of caution**

But there had also been voices of caution. What else were we to look for? Our regional ecumenical council is the Christian Conference of Asia, and our membership of that body is an important and serious commitment for many of us. In the Asian forum we had been warned of the *Eurocentrism* we might expect to find in the assembly — in the procedures employed, in the agenda commitment to the issues, in the dominance of Europeans and North Americans who would be elected onto the central committee and the presidium, and in an often-found inability to understand or to read matters from a cultural perspective other than the European/North American attitudes of so many participants.

On the whole these Asian sensitivities proved to be correct. It is easy to demonstrate this point if the political agenda of the assembly is considered, or the elections, but other matters are sometimes so elusive that it would be hard to isolate them. For instance, in an Asian assembly, there might be more inclination to work for consensus rather than the counting of heads to get the majority in any divisive debate. Debate would continue until some consensus was reached.

More care is taken in Asian forums to *save face* for participants, and great care is taken to respect the regional sensitivities which may not have been so apparent to the people from the North. It must not be forgotten that it was Asians who were concerned to see that a representative both from the China Christian Council and the Presbyterian Church in Taiwan was elected to the central committee. One method proffered was not acceptable to the assembled delegates, who appeared to be more determined to remain with the prescribed *form* of the election than to hear the Asians saying through a delegate from Thailand: “*We must have the chairman of the China Christian Council on the central committee.*” Finally, it was an Asian ecumenical leader, from Indonesia, who found the solution for the assembly, making it possible for both the CCC and the Presbyterian Church of Taiwan to be represented.

It is also fair to report that some Australians who were closely involved in the day-to-day detailed planning and organization of the assembly would want to talk of the Eurocentric bias to be found in members of the Geneva bureaucracy, who often indicated covertly (but probably quite unconsciously) in word and attitude to their undoubtedly chauvinistic Antipodean co-workers that they had some hesitation about the abilities of Australians actually to prepare an assembly. For example, is it true that someone in Geneva, when they received a recommendation from Australia that it would be a good idea to have a large number of hats available for sale to participants,

replied that they would not be necessary? Who are the people who know about the fierce heat of the Australian summer sun?

One ecumenical executive, who is a longtime friend of the WCC, and a former member of staff, had signalled his concerns about two particular problems which might arise during the course of the assembly in an article which was widely read throughout Australia.<sup>1</sup> While welcoming the petitionary theme for the assembly “Come, Holy Spirit — Renew the Whole Creation”, David Gill wondered if this renewal *motif* might encourage delegates to substitute rhetoric for reflection, and allow the Spirit to be the vehicle for bearing every passionate commitment of each individual delegate. Would talk of the wind of the Spirit blowing through new arenas and with new ideas move the assembly away from the tradition of the scriptures and the fathers, away from the *paradosis* which had been handed down from generation to generation, to endorse any and every wild idea which might arise?

His second concern was that the assembly might fall into the trap of presuming that the renewing power of the Spirit was easily able to be programmed into human activity, governed by assembly documents which would pronounce to both world and church the answers to the world’s complex problems, be they economic, political or ecological.

His forebodings proved correct. It seemed at times that the pneumatology of many participants could be expressed without any Christological or indeed scriptural foundation. There were many calls to be open to the way the Spirit was moving, and to be aware of the presence of the Spirit in new or previously unnoticed places. Being open to the Spirit is a scriptural imperative for us all, but it must be a process which tests the Spirit to see if it is truly the Spirit of God. This testing must contain the question of the consistency of relationship between the new and the old, that is, the apostolic tradition — development of the tradition, Yes!, but replacement or jettisoning of the tradition because it does not cohere with a newly-espoused enthusiasm, No!

So much of the inheritance of biblical faith requires us to hold important matters in tension. In this case we need to be both faithful to the apostolic faith and at the same time to be open to the leading of the Spirit, while always remembering that it is the Spirit who testifies to us of the truth of the apostolic tradition. If any divergence begins to appear, we should never expect that the inconsistency will be found to be in the guidance of the Spirit, but only in our own perception, and the desire to claim the endorsement of the Spirit for our own programme.

The warning of the Orthodox participants that there seems to be an increasing departure from the WCC basis, which will inevitably mean that the World Council will “*tend to become a forum for an exchange of opinions without any specific Christian theological basis...*”, was carefully noted by many non-Orthodox Australians at the assembly who shared this concern. The second warning that “we must guard against a tendency to substitute a ‘private’ spirit, the spirit of the world or other spirits for the Holy Spirit” was also received sympathetically. For Australian Anglicans in particular, these words sounded very much the same as words addressed by the Archbishop of Canterbury designate, to the members of the visitors’ programme:

We have no divine mandate to create fresh theologies unrelated to the faith delivered to the saints.



Some of the things I have read and heard here make me wonder if I am hearing the authentic tones of biblical and historic Christianity or the tones of a spirituality which have but an uneasy connection with the Christian truth...

The echoes of these questions will be on the theological agenda in Australia for some time to come. This will focus especially into debate about the gospel and culture, of inculturation and contextualization. Prof. Chung has ensured that. No-one who experienced it can forget the dramatic and electrifying presentation she brought to the plenary session in the Royal Theatre. But it was a provocative paper, challenging the theological methodology, presuppositions and conclusions of many of her listeners. It is only fair to report that many Australians, especially among the Anglican delegation, were in some sympathy with the Orthodox charge of *syncretism*. However, there were others who would reject outright this charge, and would acclaim the attempt to loosen the gospel from a Western cultural baggage.

There cannot be a proclamation of the gospel which is separate from a cultural embodiment, since, apart from anything else, the gospel is preached in the language of a culture, and it is lived out in the life of the culture. Nor can anyone suggest that the gospel can or should be communicated in any other way than through the language and symbols of any given culture, for if such an attempt is made it will result in a failure of the hearers to understand, or perhaps their conversion to the cultural expressions and forms of the preacher of the gospel message, making them irrelevant to their own culture. At the same time it must be accepted that there is the inherent power of the gospel to stand over against the culture, to offer a critique and the possibility of renewal and transformation of the very culture itself. Therefore the gospel message is expressed in the terms of a culture, but stands above it. Prof. Chung appeared to employ an epistemology in her paper which granted priority to culture over gospel, and which therefore sacralized the culture, making the gospel its servant.

Her presentation to the assembly has ensured that the perennial missiological theme of gospel and culture will be high on the Australian theological agenda. In this she has served the Australian churches well, for we too need to investigate the cultural baggage we have inherited as we search for an authentic Australian gospel message to the increasingly secularized community in which we live.

### **Faith and Order and Life and Work**

Australians who participated in the Vancouver assembly came back to us encouraged by the commitment to the baptism, eucharist and ministry (BEM) process, and the restoration of serious theological discussion through the Faith and Order agenda. Some of the more conservative sisters and brothers began to reassess their distance from the WCC as a result. The report from the San Antonio mission conference in 1989 gave a somewhat similar reassurance. We looked to the Canberra assembly to provide an added impetus for this reassessment to continue. Therefore, we were disappointed with the almost exclusive emphasis on justice issues, and on the Justice, Peace and Integrity of Creation programme, which resulted in an apparent marginalization of Faith and Order matters in Canberra. Is the JPIC programme the final nail in the coffin of ecumenical eschatology? If the Canberra assembly is our guide, we must reply in the affirmative to this question.

The ecclesiological agenda of the Faith and Order Commission in the next decade will be an important element in any WCC move to readdress this Canberra imbalance

between the Faith and Order and Church and Society streams of ecumenical activity.

The central committee will also need to consider the apparent movement in Canberra away from the careful statements of San Antonio on mission and evangelism and interfaith dialogue. Canberra at times appeared to be operating in a relativizing mode which placed Christianity alongside other faiths as one of the pathways to God. Evangelical Christians may well search in vain for any appearance of the term *evangelism* in the Canberra documents. These matters bode ill for conservative support for the World Council over the next decade.

### **The prime minister and the assembly**

Australians were gratified to know that our prime minister, the Rt Honourable Robert Hawke, would visit the opening session of the assembly and bring a welcome from the Australian parliament and people. He presented a somewhat utopian vision of the present-day actions of his government in his welcome speech, most notably in his apparent claim that his government led the worldwide opposition to apartheid in South Africa. He was gracefully thanked on behalf of the assembly by Metropolitan Gregorios who delivered one of the most brilliant speeches-in-reply one would ever be likely to hear. There was a mixed reaction to this speech by the Metropolitan. Many delegates wondered if it was perhaps a little too free, lacking in respect for the chief minister of the Australian government. Such a speech would obviously not be well received in many countries of the world where respect is always shown for authority and officialdom, no matter what one's personal opinion of the official or his speech. However, in Australia it is another matter and most Australians were warm in their enthusiasm for the Metropolitan's reply. For we are a blunt, outspoken, and egalitarian people, with a touch of the larrikin in much of what we do. No person is regarded as better than anyone else. If the prime minister left muttering "bloody un-Christian" (as one Anglican diocesan newspaper account supposed he might have),<sup>2</sup> the Australians in the audience, and most who saw media reports about it, would have been saying quietly to themselves "Good on yer, mate, you told Bob". The prime minister made a political speech which received a thoughtful reply. We have wondered since if the prime minister and his speech writers were either ill-advised or failed to appreciate the stature, the political sophistication and the depth of theological reflection on social issues of the international audience he was addressing that afternoon. He may have been wise to have sought advice on the content of his address from one or two leading ecumenical figures in Australia.

### **Aboriginal Australians**

The issue which perhaps received the most attention during the course of the assembly, apart from the long drawn-out and agonizing debate on the war in the Gulf, was the place and experience of Aboriginal Australians in the life and history of this land. Non-Aboriginal Australian delegates went to the assembly knowing that they would have to allow this focus, largely without comment, and that they would (and should) hear the international opinion about the treatment of Aboriginals since the coming of European settlement. It was not a comfortable position for white Australians to be in, and the truth and just claims of inhuman treatment, dispossession of land, cultural domination, and inequitable distribution and access to resources could



not be denied. Our Aboriginal sisters and brothers were glad to have the opportunity to plead their cause to the Australian government, churches and people through this international forum. It was generally accepted that their plenary presentation was the most professionally prepared, and that it was very moving.

In some ways it is difficult to continue under this topic for it must be obvious to readers that this paper comes from the pen of a white Australian. Will there be those who would wish to hear on this issue only from an Aboriginal Australian, or at least to have an Aboriginal view placed alongside this comment? Our experiences at the assembly showed that this is likely to be the view of a section of assembly participants.

One of my fellow Anglican delegates told us how he was asked by a Russian member of his sub-section group to make a comment upon a particular aspect of Australian society. His right to do so was immediately challenged by a black American woman who said he should not be allowed to speak on the matter since there was no Aboriginal Australian to provide an Aboriginal perspective alongside his white Australian comments. No indication had been given to the group of what he might have to say, but the moderator ruled with the black American, and our delegate was not permitted to speak. He said: "Nobody present thought this a sufficiently strange view to protest against it and I was unwilling to do so alone."

What actually happened in that sub-group was that a black versus white scenario from another culture was imposed onto our Australian relationships. It is hard to imagine this happening in an Australian gathering, unless it was focused upon a situation of direct political confrontation.

The delegation from the Anglican Church of Australia had difficulty with the terminology of the statement on indigenous peoples, particularly as it applied to the Aboriginal people of Australia. This statement came to the assembly from the Public Issues Committee without the support of any accompanying data, but in the shadow of reports from the pre-assembly visits to Aboriginal communities. The undoubted suffering of the Aboriginal people in our history over the last two centuries was referred to as *genocide*, a term high in emotive content. The use of the term *sovereignty* in the Public Issues Committee statement was a matter of concern for the Anglicans in particular. This is legal terminology which can bear a meaning of total control over and responsibility for a territory, thus inferring the possibility of a separate economic and legal system. If the term does bear this meaning, does the Public Issues Committee statement intend that recognition of Aboriginal sovereignty in Australia will mean the immediate handing over of the whole territory, government, judicial and economic systems of Australia to the Aboriginal people? The statement does say:

...We recognize that indigenous peoples of Australia and the Torres Strait Islands were independent, self-governing peoples long before Europeans invaded their land, and that they have a right to regain such control over their land under their own rule.

Such a concept is not appropriate in the Australian context, nor do the majority of Aborigines claim it. The non-Aboriginal delegates from the churches met with the Aboriginal people during the assembly and they explained that their understanding of the term related to *recognition of prior ownership of land*. They rejected any notion of a separate legal or economic system, that is, a separate state. In terms of their explanation of sovereignty no one would want to deny support to them, and we

recognize that the statement does contain the words: *...their right to define sovereignty for themselves...*

However, the document as it stands can also support the interpretation of sovereignty as total control over territory. Words and statements always have concepts behind them, and when they are written down and circulated away from the people who produce them and had an agreed understanding as to their meaning, they can take on a life of their own. Others who were not present read them in the light of their own definitions without benefit of the agreement and understanding reached, but with the benefit of their dictionaries. It is a pity that the Public Issues Committee did not look into this matter more carefully. If it had done so, the precise meaning of the term according to the Aboriginal and Islander people could have been included in that section of the document which refers to them.

### **Multicultural Australia**

To write any further on these matters will present an appearance of white defensiveness, if that has not already been adduced by readers. There are some further comments to be made about the presentation of Australian society to the assembly. The Aboriginal issues were allowed to gain such dominance that there was no possibility for assembly participants to ponder the multicultural flavour of present-day Australian society. The only time this appeared before delegates was in the celebration "Under the Southern Cross". Yet some 35 percent of the present Australian population was born overseas, and the two great population centres, Sydney and Melbourne, each have at least 140 different ethnicities represented among their citizens. Since the 1970s successive Australian governments have adopted a social policy of multiculturalism, which is strongly endorsed by the vocal and politically influential ethnic communities councils, but is not easily accepted by many Australians of Anglo-Celtic background. At the present moment community groups, including the churches, are preparing submissions for the Australian Law Reform Commission on its discussion paper *Multiculturalism and Family Law*. Many people believe that the paper is advocating that polygamy should be allowed for Muslims in Australia, though this view of the document is incorrect. However it does indicate the kind of social questions Australians face today as a result of the waves of immigration into Australia since the second world war. Alongside the Aboriginal issues we face, we are a nation in search of a common culture. We would like to have been able to discuss these matters with our overseas friends, but we were only programmed to talk about Australia through a single issue.

We would also have wished to talk about the churches which have come with the new settlers, and which are diaspora churches, related to particular ethnic groups, and acting in many ways as preservers of the culture of the homeland. In Australia, Orthodox churches have to face questions such as the use of English in the liturgy, the movement of youth away from the homeland church to more "Australian" churches (if they attend at all), and the effect of the egalitarian democratic attitudes of Australians imbibed by congregation members who accordingly grow to resent the sometimes authoritarian ways of the bishops and priests acting in the style of the home country.

### **Australia, our place in the ecumenical world**

The assembly raised again for Australian delegates our place in the ecumenical world. We have noted above the Australian membership of the Christian Conference



of Asia. We attended the Asian regional meetings, and some who were also present at Vancouver felt much more accepted and at home in the regional group in Canberra than on the previous occasion. We also felt aggrieved when European organizers placed us separately from Asians in two of the sectional regional meetings. We are not an isolated European or British outpost, and should always be treated as people from the Asia/Pacific region of the world. We also feel a close relationship with the peoples of the Pacific. At the final worship, when participants were standing during prayer for their region, it was noticeable that some Australians stood with the people of Asia, some with the people from the Pacific, and some stood with both groups. As delegates we had to learn to assume our role in the Asian regional meetings, being careful not to be dominant, but at the same time indicating our sense of belonging, and our willingness to share in the concerns of the region. We were demonstrating in microcosm that role which our nation is really only just beginning to understand and carve out for itself in this part of the world. We need to be true partners with the peoples of Asia and the Pacific, neither dominant nor exploitative, but ready always to identify with and promote their concerns.

When planning began for the seventh assembly to be held in Australia, many of us were given the impression that Pacific concerns would be as dominant as Aboriginal issues in the assembly. It is a matter of regret that this did not eventuate. For the assembly will not be held in this part of the world again in the near future, and the opportunity to focus in depth on the important concerns and just causes of the Pacific peoples will have to await some future opportunity. The Pacific people present in Canberra were ready to speak on their issues whenever opportunity arose, but they are a quiet people, and their voice could often be drowned out. This is how one woman from Papua New Guinea raised this with her sub-section:

My vision of the WCC assembly is that it should not just be full of documents and words, but that it should be “an ear” to listen to the people. And not just to the people with the loud voices, but to the little voices from the ocean, which can be drowned out by the wind and the waves. Listen to the voices of the little people from the ocean.

The nations of the North continue to dump their nuclear wastes in the Pacific ocean, large fishing fleets engaging in drift-net fishing threaten the marine ecology and the livelihood of the Pacific people, and global warming may mean that certain minuscule islands could be covered by the sea. Where was the major focus we were led to expect on these specific issues in the assembly held in the Asia/Pacific region?

### **Assembly process and representation**

Every article appearing on the assembly comments on the process and the impact of the representation categories. During the meetings, some were heard to complain that it was rather like attending an *ecumenical Sunday school*, for we were treated to any number of plenary presentations which allowed no debate and therefore little engagement with the issues they raised. Sometimes the tedium of the presentation further obscured the particular issues. These presentations made it very difficult for delegates to develop any real sense of personal ownership of the WCC programmes.

The fact that, for a variety of reasons, a number of days were cut off the length of the assembly meant that there was extreme pressure of time as the assembly

programme progressed. Time allocated for debate, and the short time allowed for speeches, meant that it was very difficult for delegates to develop cogent and persuasive arguments which would coalesce into a determination to change either the shape or content of the reports which came to the plenary session from the special assembly committees. This also resulted in the perception that these documents did not belong to the assembled delegates, but rather to the committees. The statements and reports, dealt with so summarily in the plenary sessions, appeared to be handed down to the assembly, rather than arising from its deliberations. People again felt no sense of personal ownership.

If this attitude felt by many Australians is general across the delegations, it can only result in inappropriate responses to the WCC and the fruits of the assembly in the member churches. For the WCC programmes will usually be identified with and most effectively promoted by individuals in member churches who have been set on fire with enthusiasm for the WCC agenda within the assembly. One doubts whether many people went home with such enthusiasm from the Canberra assembly.

Sometimes it felt as though we were attending a *world convention of Christians* rather than a WCC assembly. The categories of representation demanded from the member churches for their delegations produce this effect. By the time the required balances are achieved they result in a body of individuals who represent themselves and their own opinions with some force, but who may not necessarily be able to represent the views of their member church. They seemed unlikely to have the necessary experience or expertise to deal with the matters before them and this may have serious consequences for the image of the WCC in the member churches, and the reception of the assembly statements and documents. The present process can result in people with possibly idiosyncratic expertise having undue influence on assembly work, and receiving little serious challenge to what they present. It can also result in statements and documents which have a high emotional force, being based on a preferred moral stance, but which may or may not have actual data which can be offered in support of the argument.

Unless the WCC moves away from the absolute attachment to category representation based on age, gender, etc., which is demanded with such high emotion, it will begin to be regarded even more than it often is now as somewhat less than a credible commentator on public and social issues. The *Open Letter to Emilio Castro, the General Secretary of the World Council of Churches*, which was circulated prior to the assembly by friends of the WCC, who had met in Vancouver in July 1990, signalled the unease many people are beginning to feel about the methodology being employed in the determination of ecumenical social ethics. It proved to be a prophetic document about the statements of the Canberra assembly. There must be a return to a greater emphasis on the opinion of expert advisers from a wide variety of theoretical bases before statements are issued in the name of any WCC assembly.

Some Australian males believe that the most marginalized people in the assembly were lay males over thirty years of age. We were interested in the Asian regional meeting in section III to hear one of our Asian friends suggest that we should urge the WCC to set up a special layman's desk for, he argued, they are now as marginalized as any other people in the ecumenical community.



### **The Australian churches in the post-assembly period**

What effects will be Canberra assembly have on the life of the Australian churches? The Anglican Church will need to ask itself why there were two and one-half times as many members of the Uniting Church in the accredited visitors' programme as there were Anglicans. What does this figure indicate about Australian Anglican commitment to the ecumenical movement? Will the major impact of the Canberra assembly be located in the Uniting Church in Australia and the Canberra churches?

The Australian media, apart from the Australian Broadcasting Corporation and the Canberra media outlets, paid little heed to the WCC assembly. The major cities of Sydney and Melbourne saw very little reporting of the day-to-day activities, in contrast to Canberra. This was a major international conference in our community, with the world church in our midst, and the media on the whole chose to ignore it. This is symptomatic of the secularized nation which is Australia, but how can the churches address this indifference?

One further delicate comment. It became clear to delegates during the course of the assembly that there was a significant difference between the reaction of the Uniting Church and Anglican delegations to certain of the major issues. This may best be instanced by reference to the positions held by the two delegations during the Gulf war debates. The Uniting Church expressed, in a careful statement to the assembly, the distance their delegation felt from the views expressed to the assembly by the Australian prime minister. The Anglican Church delegation was concerned about some sections of the statement on the Gulf war prepared by the Public Issues Committee, and every Anglican delegate registered dissent in writing from the so-called "pacifist" clause which was later deleted from the statement. Similarly, the Uniting Church delegation did not appear to be quite as concerned as the Anglicans about the use of the term *sovereignty* in the indigenous peoples statement from the Public Issues Committee. This difference in attitude on important social issues between the two major ecclesiastical bodies in the Australian Council of Churches will need to be pondered by the Council of the ACC and the general secretary at some length, especially in view of the present negotiations which will result in Roman Catholic membership of either the ACC or a new ecumenical instrument. It will also need to be considered by the two churches themselves. The Anglicans may need to ask themselves if their innate caution, careful reflection, and requirement of precision in terminology can often impede passionate commitment and action. The Uniting Church members may need to ask themselves if their enthusiasm and passionate commitment to their causes may not sometimes be better served by a dose of the Anglican caution, reflection and dedication to precision in terminology, that is, a little of what Archbishop Robert Runcie was wont to call Anglican "passionate coolness". What implications does this have for our ecumenical future and our combined impact upon the life of this nation?

Will the Australian churches lapse into ecumenical somnolence now the assembly is over, or will we become an ecumenically revitalized community?

#### NOTES

<sup>1</sup> David Gill, "Come, Holy Spirit: Renew the WCC!", *National Outlook*, Vol. 12, No. 10, December 1990, pp.8ff.

<sup>2</sup> *Anglican Encounter*, journal of the diocese of Newcastle, March 1991, p.7.

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# Must God Remain Greek?

*Stanley S. Harakas*

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## **Introduction**

I am grateful for the invitation to put down on paper some of my reflections on the seventh assembly for this issue of *The Ecumenical Review* while I am still at the assembly. Tomorrow we leave Canberra for our homes, and I reflect on the numerous wonderful experiences shared here during these two weeks.

The Canberra experiences — to say the least — have been rich, varied and complex. It would take many pages to merely list them and much more space to interpret them. Nevertheless, for me as an Orthodox priest and theologian, the overarching concern has been the confrontation in this assembly of a liberation-theology approach to mission and church life with the traditional approach to theology and church life.

In one of the conference newspaper stories, Konrad Raiser bemoaned the fact that these two perspectives did not have an opportunity to get beyond conflict and contrast. In this reflection (and it cannot be considered anything more than that), I want to address the issue of these two approaches to the Christian message while still immersed in the assembly context.

What happened here was not a first encounter for me with persons or ideas inspired by the approach to theology, religion, ethics and mission that begins from the ground up. For example, at a conference I attended in Philadelphia a number of years ago the theme was that Christian encounter with other religions should begin with a rejection by Christians of the uniqueness of Christ and his saving work. Such views have been promoted in the writings of Paul Knitter, Raimundo Pannikar, Wilfred Cantwell Smith and Leonard Swidler. I remember reacting quite negatively then, a response that appeared in the published proceedings, *Toward a Universal Theology of Religion*.

A similar negative reaction was provoked during the assembly by Prof. Chung's presentation in which the Holy Spirit was seen as the "spirit" of many different persons and things, including religious beings and ideas from her traditional Korean background. These lines are provoked by this reaction.

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### **Must God remain Greek?**

Robert Hood, a black theologian in the United States, raised this issue recently in a provocative way by asking in the title of his presentation at this year's American Academy of Religion meeting: "Must God Remain Greek? Can Euro-American Christian Doctrines Be Inclusive for Afro God-Talk?" It was his way of asking whether for Christianity there was only one way of articulating the Christian faith. He asked the question "must God remain Greek?" to point to the historical and cultural setting of the apostolic community and the early church, which formulated its method of conveying the "Good News" influenced by a Greek world, with its problems, language, metaphysics and religious preconceptions.

In this context, to ask if God is Greek is to react sharply against an approach to Christianity that apparently sanctifies one culture and its thought-forms at the expense of every other. In the specific contexts of black, feminist and third-world theological approaches, the pain of this question becomes even sharper. For Blacks and others of colour, the question also asks if God is white; for women, it asks if God is male; for third-world Christians, it asks if God is a colonialist. In missionary, indigenous, local church terms, it is a reaction against a missionary tactic that too readily discarded and suppressed local, national and cultural values and experience, in order to impose the supposedly superior European values on "less developed" peoples. To ask "must God remain Greek?" is a way of struggling to find and identify the validity of one's own existence and its legitimacy in the kingdom of God.

It is not difficult to understand why a spirit of rebelliousness accompanies the question. As I reflect on the way some respond to the question, I try to do so in the comprehensive, inclusive, revelatory, mystical, sacramental tradition of Eastern Orthodox Christianity. Must God remain Greek? My answer is paradoxical: No! Yes! Somehow!

### **God is not Greek — nor Korean, nor Australian, nor white...**

The first lesson an Orthodox student of theology learns is the fundamental distinction between God and everything else. This "apophatic" or negative theological approach tells us that in a fundamental and essential way nothing in human experience can be identified with what God is. For this reason, the Orthodox begin their theologizing with an affirmation of the unbridgeable ignorance of creatures regarding what God is in the very being of divine existence. It was St John of Damascus who in the eighth century summarized this view: "God is unknowable and incomprehensible. The only thing knowable and comprehensible about God is his unknowability and his incomprehensibility."

Those who would theologize should tack that quote at eye-level above their writing desks (or computer monitors). No system of thought, no human categories, no cultural expressions, no human words, no art, no symbols, can fully capture the being of God for us. God is simply, fully and totally transcendent to human experience in his being. God is not Greek. Nor is God Korean, European, Australian, white, black or yellow, male or female. Everyone who reflects on God must stand in awe before God's total holy otherness. To call God "holy" precisely means that we acknowledge God's transcendence.

### Yes, “God is Greek” in important ways for Christians

The second thing a student of Orthodox theology learns is that while God is wholly unknown and totally unapproachable in his being (the divine essence), God has made himself known to the created world and to humanity through his divine energies. For the Orthodox, God’s energies are nothing other than God reaching out to create, sustain, provide for, nurture and save the cosmos that he has created. The divine energies are divine grace. Every creature and person and culture is sustained by the energies of God. In this sense all creation is imbued with the Spirit of God, even when it is distorted and corrupted by sin. Similarly, every human existence and every human culture is, in one way or another, sustained by divine grace, i.e., the divine energies.

The story of salvation, however, makes a clear distinction between the sustaining energies of God and the redeeming, restoring, healing, saving energies of God. This story of salvation is based on the *use* for the divine purpose of two cultures, the Hebrew and the Greek, to convey the saving message. The key to this statement, however, is not the cultures mentioned, but the “use” of them. Both were “used” to become vehicles of communication with and for redemption and salvation.

It is very important to see *how* they were used. A good example is the prologue to the Gospel of John. From the early Greek philosopher Heraclitus, the Greek word “logos” served the interests of philosophy. Every major Greek philosopher used it. It was a sign and mark of Greek culture, if anything could be. But the fourth Gospel’s use of it was perhaps unrecognizable to first-century Greek philosophers. You could say that in Christian hands the Greek term “logos” was scooped out so that only the shell remained. That was all the Greek that was left. In the Gospel of John the term “logos” was packed with a new meaning, a Christian meaning, an incarnational, Trinitarian meaning.

Now this is my point. The scriptures we have are the only ones we have. The Christian tradition preceded the Greek scriptures, gave them this concrete form and subsequently interpreted them. The scriptures themselves *use* Hebrew and Greek. The vehicles we have to understand the revelation of God are formulated in this particular cultural form. We have no other. But the reality is that these sources of revelation are the products of an incarnational reality. In themselves the Hebrew culture and the Greek culture are not sources of revelation, not redemptive, not adequate for the renewal of the cosmos, including the life of fallen and sinful human beings.

Is God Greek? Well, in the sense that this particular culture provided the outward form for the expression of God’s revelation in Jesus Christ, the answer is “yes”. There is this Hebrew/Greek particularity which simply cannot be substituted by any other. But, if “God is Greek” in this sense, it is an external identification. After all, we are told that in Christ, “there is no Jew, nor Greek” (Gal. 3:28). There is a tightrope here that requires us to walk it with care. There is a paradox here that should not be relaxed.

In ecumenical relations, the *WCC basis* serves to keep this reality before us. The basis expresses this core reality: the Trinity and the Saviour Jesus Christ and the church. In the history of the church it was expressed in its creed: an affirmation of Father, Son and Holy Spirit, of the saving person and work of Jesus Christ, of the church, the sacraments and the eschatological expectation of the kingdom. If this is Greek, so be it. Without it there is chaos. But if it is Greek, it is a Greek which has been scooped out and packed full of a new meaning, a Christian meaning.



### **Somehow acknowledging the given, and incarnating the unknown**

But that is not the end of the story. The best missionary theory of both Eastern and Western Christianity — Orthodox, Roman Catholic and Protestant — knew that just as “the word became flesh and dwelt among us” (John 1:14), the Christian message must be incarnated in the languages, cultures and mind-sets of all people, *using* every possible cultural expression to convey the saving message. The message and its “way” must be genuinely available to cultures, nations, races, genders, ages, intelligences and ways of life.

The struggle here is how to acknowledge the integrity of the given character of the revelation while being able to incarnate it in every human condition. The continuing dilemma of the Bible translator is one example of the difficulty of doing it. Concurrently, the urgency of the translator’s task also hammers home the necessity of incarnating the gospel in every language, and the necessity of doing it well.

At the assembly, Prof. Chung Hyun Kyung’s dramatic presentation of the theme was a powerful articulation of the striving of peoples to affirm the incarnational dynamic of the Christian message. But for many, it also showed how dangerous the effort can be. Seeking to incarnate the gospel in culture can slip into the substitution of the gospel by culture. When some participants in the assembly saw much more in the presentation than a fitting and appropriate incarnation of the Christian message in other cultural forms, they became disturbed. Some (not all) aspects of the presentation conveyed the message that any aspect of culture, any religious affirmation, any ritual of a people could in itself be a source of Christian revelation. Some Orthodox quickly responded with charges of “paganism” and “syncretism”. Harsh criticism indeed.

The *Assembly Line* issue of Monday, 11 February, conveyed an invitation in response from Prof. Chung to the Orthodox participants to debate what appeared to them as “syncretism and paganism” in her plenary presentation. Unfortunately, this response indicated that she did not understand that the issue itself, in Orthodox perception, was beyond debate. The Orthodox felt that by shifting from the incarnation of the Christian message in a particular culture to the making of a particular culture a source of redemptive revelation, an important line had been crossed.

The issue was not “your traditions” and “our traditions”. The Orthodox appreciation of the cultures of people and their incorporation into the fabric of Christian life is well known. The Orthodox have been doing this since Pentecost. While Western Christianity during the middle ages was imposing a dead liturgical language upon every nation and culture, Orthodoxy was translating scripture and liturgy into the languages of different peoples and incarnating the Christian faith in indigenous cultures and national heritages from the earliest centuries. The first nation to become officially Christian was Armenia in the early fourth century, with its own language, its own liturgy and its own native clergy. One look around a plenary meeting of the assembly gives clear visual witness to that truth. The multiplicity of forms of clerical garb among the Orthodox, Eastern and Oriental, is a sign of the plurality of cultures within the Orthodox church.

The fundamental missionary principles of Orthodox Christianity have been and are today incarnational in spirit and practice. Wherever possible, the language, culture, traditions and customs of peoples are respected and incorporated into church life. The critical difference between the age-long practice and what the Orthodox saw and heard

in Prof. Chung's presentation and in other expressions of this theological approach, is to be found in the word "possible" in the previous sentence.

For in every tradition and nation and culture there are elements which are opposed to the gospel. There are beliefs and practices that are not compatible with the fundamental affirmations of the Christian faith. In short, as the Greek Orthodox Archbishop of Australia, Stylianos Harkianakis, put it, "we are ready to accept everything as long as it is acceptable". What makes it acceptable is that it not contradict the essential core of the Christian faith as described above. The Orthodox themselves must struggle against nationalisms that become idolatries. We know of what we speak.

To equate the Christian message with every other religious affirmation and tradition is unacceptable. If this were the case there would be no "Good News" in the gospel of Jesus Christ. This theology, in effect, negates the uniqueness and the necessity of the person of the divine/human Jesus Christ and his redemptive work for the world. It confuses all the "spirits" of this world with the "Holy Spirit".

This confusion is not new. The scriptures describe similar confusions and reject them. Not all spirits are good. There are "demonic spirits" (Rev. 16:14). The Lord Jesus cast them out (Matt. 8:16) and he gave the disciples "authority over unclean spirits" (Mark 6:7). One of the gifts of the Holy Spirit is "the ability to distinguish between spirits" (1 Cor. 12:10).

The early church was instructed, precisely, not to "believe every spirit", but "to test the spirits to see whether they are of God" (1 John 4:1). If the early church were to have followed this syncretistic approach, Apollo and Zeus and Minerva and Aphrodite would also have been accepted as Christian, and the blood of the martyrs would have been poured out for no purpose. The martyrs died precisely because they saw that offering just a little incense to the false gods of Rome was idolatry.

This was not debatable for the early Christians. It is not debatable for the Orthodox and many other Christians today. Our incarnational theology provokes us to "accept everything that is acceptable". But those approaches that confuse the unconfusable and equate the Saviour and the Holy Spirit with every and any other "spirit", "god" and religious conception are unacceptable. The Orthodox hold that we must spurn and reject that which contradicts the fundamental centrality of the Triune God.

As we "discerned the spirits" in Prof. Chung's presentation, we recognized with her many "good spirits" from the Korean culture. For these, we are grateful. We pray that every people and culture can find ways by which the Holy Spirit can be incarnated in everything good in their cultures. As the letter to the Philippians puts it in another context, "... whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is gracious, if there is any excellence, if there is anything worthy of praise, think about these things" (Phil. 4:8). And we would add, incorporate them into your expression of the Christian faith. But, by way of method, the affirmation in the same epistle remains crucial:

Let the same mind be in you that was in Christ Jesus, who, though he was in the form of God, did not regard equality with God as something to be exploited, but emptied himself, taking the form of a slave, being born in human likeness. And being found in human form, he humbled himself and became obedient to the point of death — even death on a cross.

Therefore God also highly exalted him and gave him the name that is above every name, so that at the name of Jesus every knee should bend, in heaven and on earth and under the



earth, and every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father (Phil. 2:5-11, NRSV).

So, “must God remain Greek?” receives a paradoxical answer. No! Yes! Somehow! There is a core Christian truth that is to be found expressed in the shell of a culture. It is historically what it is. It is there, in the Greek scriptures and the early Christian tradition, that the tradition of revelation is to be found. There is no other. There is no substitute for it. But it is a message and “way” that must itself be incarnated in every culture and nation and people (including that of modern-day Greeks) and for all persons in the lived reality of their concrete experience.

The quarrel with the liberation theology approach is that it collapses an uncollapsible tension and makes the creature the criterion of the “logos”. Rather, for Christianity it must be the other way around: “In the beginning was the Word (the Logos)” (John 1:1).

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# Liberation of the Holy Spirit

*Tissa Balasuriya*

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“He, She or It”... how does one speak of the Holy Spirit? The different pronouns imply divergences of age, sex, geography, culture, theology and perhaps even of the fundamental understanding of the Christian faith among the nearly four thousand delegates and other participants at the WCC seventh assembly.

“Come, Holy Spirit — Renew the Whole Creation” was chosen as the overall theme of the assembly some years before. The world has changed dramatically since then, indicating in some instances a blowing of the Spirit in our times. The theme had a significant impact on the preparation and course of the assembly. The old dogmatic issues concerning the nature and role of Jesus Christ were not central to the discussion at the assembly and in its preparatory processes as they had been at previous assemblies. These earlier gatherings had drawn attention to the lordship and salvific nature of Jesus Christ, and this implied also a certain stress on the nature of the church, its role and authority. This in turn meant that the issues for discussion were determined by structural theologians.

Making the Spirit the central theme of the assembly meant a certain liberation for the assembly itself. As the Spirit cannot be controlled or claimed by anyone, there is much greater freedom for the churches to evolve a theology and a church life relevant to the needs of the times.

This very freedom, however, meant that the understanding of the Holy Spirit became itself an important issue at the assembly. It brought about a dialogue and debate that were perhaps not expected by the majority of participants. The understanding and interpretation of the Spirit became for some a focus of hope, openness, freedom, relevance and commitment within Christianity. For others it was a threat to what they had understood as the basic doctrine of the Trinity, held and proclaimed every Sunday in the eucharist since the fourth century when it was defined by the council of Nicea (325).

The organizers probably had an inkling of what was to come when they chose Parthenios, Patriarch of Alexandria, and Prof. Chung Hyun Kyung of the Presbyterian

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Church in the Republic of Korea as the keynote speakers to introduce the theme of the assembly. The young woman scholar represented, in many senses, a position quite different from that of the venerable Patriarch, even though both reflected on the Holy Spirit within the Christian tradition. To the theologians of the “Establishment” Dr Chung was a danger to the doctrine and unity of the church. To the conservative protesters against the WCC, who feared communism, secularism and Saddam Hussein and demonstrated against the WCC, Dr Chung and her presentation of theology with music and dance represented the danger of the pagan world entering into the sanctuary of the church.

### **1. The Patriarch’s position**

The Orthodox Patriarch of Alexandria represents an ancient Christian tradition stemming from the times of the apostles. His predecessors, like Athanasius the Great, had been prominent among those who helped formulate the doctrines and dogmas of the church, especially in the critical fourth and fifth centuries. As the Patriarch reminded the assembly, many believe that traditionally and historically it is Orthodoxy that lives and moves and has its being in the Holy Spirit and is “pneumatological”. He added: “I believe, however, that all the churches live and move in the Holy Spirit. There is no church, no creature, no human person apart from the Spirit.”

This universalist view of the operation of the Spirit was expressed by the Patriarch in terms of the doctrines of the church. “When we speak about the Holy Spirit, we are speaking about the Holy Trinity. There is no Holy Spirit apart from the Holy Trinity... It is our creed they are ever one, undivided, indivisible, unchanging, of one substance.” Indeed the Patriarch shifted between two positions, one regarding God and the Spirit as “mystery” and the other seeing them as defined by the councils of the church. On the one hand he says, with Athanasius, that “a God who is understood is no God”. “Our starting point is ‘ignorance’, the impossibility of knowledge. The church fathers said of the mystery of God, ‘go no further, say no more’.” On the other hand he asserts that “the mystery is the theology of the Trinity, Christology, pneumatology and ecclesiology”.

Thus the Patriarch professes both ignorance in the realm of “mystery” and knowledge in the realm of the revelation of the Spirit through the church. “The Holy Spirit is the Paraclete, who proceeds from the Father and is sent by the Son. Christ sent the Spirit to his disciples, as he said himself, to show them his love, to assure them that on the way they would not be alone.” From this vantage point he regards the church as the most privileged locus of the Spirit. “There is no other way; this is the only, the eternal way which Christ gives us in his church: the way of the Paraclete.”

The Patriarch then derived his theology of the Spirit from his Christology and ecclesiology. He claimed that the life of the church is from the Spirit. Hence the seven sacraments are of the Spirit and communicate divine life to Christians. The Spirit is linked to the Christian view of salvation, or soteriology. “With him we would strive for the salvation and redemption of all. Because we are his disciples, it is fitting that we should be his friends, since we are his church, his people.” In this perspective the Spirit is interpreted in the light of the Christological and Trinitarian definitions of the fourth and fifth centuries, after the church became the official religion of the Roman empire. Then the Spirit that should be the principle of freedom became, in my view, one which gave special privileges to the church and the clergy.

The Patriarch drew very general conclusions concerning mission, church union, dialogue, the environment, justice and peace, freedom, and renewal. He did not, however, touch on any controversial issue in any specific way.

The theology of the Spirit proposed by the Patriarch is one that has prevailed in the church, especially in Orthodoxy, from the fourth and fifth centuries. It was evolved in the times of the classic debates on the Trinity, Christology and ecclesiology. It results, I believe, in virtually confining the Spirit to the church, or at least making the church the most significant manifestation of the Spirit. Such a theology could seem adequate within a mono-religious culture and society, as Europe was until recent centuries. The other religions were then not regarded as of the Spirit; the Christians were the people of God, as the Patriarch claims even for today.

The Patriarch's presentation could have been made in the fourth or fifth century. It was the classical theology of Orthodoxy with a general mention, towards the end, of the issues of mission, dialogue, justice and peace. The theology of the seven sacraments was referred to as a presence of the Spirit in the church. Ecclesiology, soteriology and eschatology were all related to the Spirit.

## **2. The position of Dr Chung Hyun Kyung**

Some Orthodox and other theologians objected to Dr Chung's presentation, pronouncing that it was syncretistic, and a paganization of Christianity. What they failed to recall is that the traditional or classical presentation of the doctrine of the Holy Spirit in the church is also in categories that are derived from "pagan" philosophies. On the one hand they say God is a mystery, but on the other they claim to know that the Holy Spirit is of the same "substance" as the Father and the Son. It is true that this is a defined doctrine of the church; but that does not prevent it from being of "pagan" origin. It is an expression of the mystery of God in terms of Greek philosophy. In fact some of the divisions of the churches were due to different understandings of terms used in Greek philosophy such as *prosopon* and *homousion*, which are not from Jesus himself or even from the apostles.

It could be justly argued that when the ancients have recourse to their cultures to interpret the divine it is called theology; when persons of non-European cultures use their own concepts and images to speak of God, the theological establishment calls it "syncretism" and "paganization" of Christianity. A participant at the assembly asked whose paganism are we concerned about — that of the North or South, of the West or East?

It was in this connection that Dr Chung asked what is the criterion for discerning the Spirit? She stressed that women, and persons from many parts of the world, had listened to European, aged, male patriarchal, academic and dominant interpretations of the Spirit for 2000 years. Could they now, she asked, listen to us for twenty years? She said that her theology came from the ordinary people who experience the struggle for sheer existence. Theology, she maintained, is about mystery, it is poetry and struggle. Theology is not merely logical analysis.

Her presentation of theory was preceded and followed by dances and an invocation of the spirits of those who have gone before us, especially those who have suffered injustice. Dr Chung then invoked the spirits of the ancestors to return and to inspire us today. The invocations were accompanied by the music of the drums...



According to traditional Korean belief, she noted, these spirits are hovering on earth seeking to right wrongs. They bear the “han”, anger or cry for justice of those wronged. “Han is anger. Han is resentment. Han is bitterness. Han is grief...” These spirits are, for her, the presence of the Holy Spirit. They have been agents through whom the Holy Spirit has spoken her compassion and wisdom. “The spirits of our ancestors... are for us the icons of the Holy Spirit who become tangible and visible to us.”

Making these “spirits” the representative of the Holy Spirit was a quite different proposition from making the decisions of the church authorities the voice of the Holy Spirit. This meant bringing in other voices from the people’s past experience, voices over which the church had no control. It implied that these spirits were critical of the things done by Christians in the past in the name of God, for example the crusades. This brought a radically different hermeneutic into the process of discerning the Spirit. It is a process open to all humankind. It understands nature too as the dwelling place of the Spirit. Naturally the church hierarchy would find this a difficult principle to accept.

Dr Chung went further in identifying the presence of the Spirit. The Spirit is not “an omnipotent, macho, warrior God who rescues all good guys and punishes all bad guys. I rely on the compassionate God who weeps with us for life in the midst of the cruel destruction of life.” The Spirit of God is in the struggle of the poor. “Only when we can hear this cry for life and can see the signs of liberation are we able to recognize the Holy Spirit’s activity in the midst of suffering creation.”

Thereafter she distinguished between the spirit of Babel and the Spirit of Pentecost. The former is the spirit of mammon, greed, war, exploitation, destruction of persons and of nature. The Spirit of God empowers the weak; it chooses life and not death. The Spirit of God calls us to repentance; mutuality not patriarchy, harmony not war. It is the Spirit that rids us of anthropocentrism. The Spirit is life-centred, caring for all creation including nature. The Spirit is the spirit of life, not of death. The Spirit is the energy that moves people to break down the walls of division, as is now happening in Korea. She concluded: “Dear sisters and brothers, with the energy of the Holy Spirit let us tear apart all walls of division and the culture of death which separate us.”

### **3. A criterion for discerning the Spirit**

Given such a diversity of perspectives how can we, as Christians, find a criterion for discerning the Holy Spirit? I would like to suggest that we focus on the core values of the teaching of Jesus. Since the basic message of Jesus is that we love one another and love God, whatever is of the Holy Spirit should foster love of one another. What fosters hatred is not “of God”.

Thus we propose a twofold principle — one negative and one positive — for discerning the Spirit and for evaluating theological positions on the Spirit.

a) *Negatively*: Any teaching or theology authentically derived from the Spirit of God in Jesus must be loving, respectful and fulfilling of all humanity in all places and times. This is the nature of the just and loving God revealed in the Bible, especially by Jesus himself. Hence any element in theology that insults, degrades, dehumanizes and discriminates against any portion of humanity cannot be “from God or Jesus”. Any such element in Christian theology should be exorcised. As Jesus says “from their fruits you will know them”, and fruits of hatred cannot come from Jesus or from God.

This gives a principle for discerning the Spirit and for the purification of any prevailing and predominant Christian theology. The churches can manifest the Spirit; but not only the churches. The Spirit of God is not tied to the church. The Spirit of God is beyond all created beings. What is done by the churches is not necessarily always from the Spirit. Thus when the churches fought each other for decades they were not doing so due to the Spirit.

b) *Positively*: Since all good comes from God, everything truly humanizing and ennobling in any religion or ideology is also ultimately from the Holy Spirit, and must be respected as such. As God wills the happiness and fulfilment of all persons and peoples, the more a theology leads to genuine human self-realization of all persons and peoples, the closer it is to the divine Spirit.

This principle of critique is also a rational and ethical one. It can be applied to any religion or ideology. God in Jesus Christ is a God of love who cares for all, irrespective of any divisions, even those of creed. The centrality of universal love is a measuring rod of the authenticity of any sacred text, church teaching or practice. Jesus himself struggled against false interpretations of the law and the prophets.

This principle helps us to liberate the Holy Spirit from positions unfaithful to Jesus' own teaching, e.g. the understanding of God as intolerant, partial and cruel. It helps us discern within some theological positions the elements which cannot be from God in Jesus, and must come from human, sectarian sources. This is particularly necessary in our pluralist context. Such a critical dialogue can help correct some distortions in theology, and give more attention to Jesus' core message.

This can be a better, deeper and more lasting basis for inter-religious cooperation at all levels, including social justice and human liberation. Such a dialogue can disengage the core message of Christianity from its encrustation in a particular culture or a particular theological "school". The faith in and discipleship of Jesus can then be seen in clear perspective. It can be related creatively to the core message of other world religions — if these too can be seen in their essence, beyond their particular religio-cultural expressions.

### **A critical purification of theology**

When we find that some teachings of Christian "theology" have been harmful, injurious and degrading to human beings, or have legitimized injustice, we should re-examine such theology. The reform of the church has come through such self-criticism. When the church was unable to accept and integrate such criticism there were ruptures in the life of the church, as at the time of the Protestant Reformation.

A doctrine which is seemingly harmless in one context may have negative effects in another. Thus the Christian theology elaborated in relative isolation in the Europe of the middle ages may be harmful in a pluralistic context of different religions and social systems. From the seventh or eighth century to the mid-fifteenth century the Muslim powers isolated Europe from Africa and Asia. Christians regarded Europe as the centre of the world, and the others known to them were "infidels" and "enemies". They theologized in a situation in which all the people with whom they were in regular peaceful contact were in all probability Christians. Hence a theology that considered baptism essential for salvation was not seen as harmful or inconvenient to anyone there. Thus it could easily go unchallenged for centuries; everyone could take it for



granted. Now large-scale secularization and religious pluralism raise serious issues concerning such theological positions.

This principle of critical evaluation is applicable to other religions too. Thus if any teaching or practice of Hinduism, Buddhism, Islam, Taoism, Shintoism, Judaism or any other religion "looks down on" other religions, considers itself as exclusively possessing the truth, is intolerant of others, or marginalizes a section of humanity (such as the poor or women), then it should become subject to self-purification. This would be against its own better inspirations. It cannot be from the Spirit of God, the Absolute who cares for and loves all humankind. Nor can it be a principle of genuine enlightenment, one which liberates persons to lasting happiness.

The spirits of the ancestors and any other inspirations of the Spirit have to be discerned according to this principle. All that was done by the ancestors or in their name is not necessarily right.

Traditional theology, I believe, has more or less imprisoned the Holy Spirit within the power of the ecclesiastical authorities. New interpretations of the Spirit raise the question of how we can be sure that they are in keeping with the teaching of Jesus. This discussion begun at the Canberra assembly needs to be continued in a fruitful dialogue between the Orthodox churches and the theology emerging in the feminist movement and in the third world.

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# A Lack of Focus?

*Donna Geernaert*

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For me the theme of the seventh WCC assembly, “Come, Holy Spirit — Renew the Whole Creation”, was most concretely expressed through the diversity of those who attended. At the opening liturgy, the evident variety in age, race, culture, and religious traditions gave eloquent testimony to the ingathering power of the Holy Spirit who reverses the tower of Babel, and enables members of many different nations to speak in their own languages about the mighty works of God. While this diversity offers a richness and a reason for rejoicing, it also presents a very specific challenge. For dialogue to occur, the diversity of the other must not only be acknowledged but understood and respected. While linguistic and cultural homogeneity may not guarantee either understanding or respect, differences in language and culture can only render their achievement more difficult. As a bold attempt at translating diversity into dialogue, the Canberra assembly was a proclamation of Christian hope for a divided world.

## I

For many participants, it was during the worship services that diversity genuinely entered into dialogue. Worship was well planned to reflect different liturgical perspectives. Music was a highlight of every service. Varied in language and style, hymns were well rehearsed and directed so that all could join in. Traditional liturgical symbols were carefully chosen and creatively adapted to the assembly setting. Accompanied by simple explanations, the use of these symbols enabled the congregation to pray in body as well as in spirit. In the context of an assembly calling on the Holy Spirit to renew the whole creation, this recognition of the spiritual power of the physical world seemed particularly appropriate. By providing an opportunity for participants to experience forms of prayer practised in other Christian traditions, assembly worship played a significant role in fostering understanding and respect. While the inability to share a common eucharist remains a painful fact in ecumenical worship, the assembly planners appear to have adopted a kind of Lund principle which focused on praying together in as many ways as possible. Such an approach can only enhance growth in communion.

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During the assembly, many participants expressed appreciation for the planning that had gone into the worship services. Another example of the WCC's careful planning for the Canberra assembly was in the area of communications. In addition to the pre-assembly documentation which provided interesting and informative background on the WCC, the theme and sub-themes and the Australian context, the daily publication of *Assembly Line* helped to create a sense of unity. With so many people in attendance, no one could participate in every activity. The daily newspaper format was, therefore, a good way to keep in touch both for changes in schedule and for summaries of major events. While questions can always be raised about what an editor or writer regards as newsworthy, *Assembly Line* generally seemed more interested in fair reporting than in highlighting controversy. Yet it seems reasonable to ask if in reporting protests made by non-participants everything that occurs should be presented as "news". And since "a picture is worth a thousand words", does not the photograph of the very dubious sign raised during the session on the Joint Working Group give the incident and its message more prominence than it deserves?

## II

During the first week of the assembly, a number of plenary sessions were devoted to presentations on the theme and the activities of WCC commissions or programme units. These, too, gave evidence of the planning committee's awareness of the need to respect different learning styles stemming from differences in age, race and culture. Music, skits and symbols were used to supplement and clarify the verbal presentation of ideas. Yet, with one or two notable exceptions, the presentations seemed to lack dynamism. The focus seemed to be more on the reaffirmation of accepted ideas or positions than on the exploration of new concepts or initiatives. Thus as the assembly moved into its second week it is not surprising that some questioned the amount of time which had been spent in an essentially passive appropriation of material. Further, the purpose of the presentations in relation to the rest of the assembly remained unclear. Were they intended as information, report, education, or part of the assembly's agenda-setting process? If the latter, some steps should be taken to ensure effective integration and participation. If the former, perhaps the amount of overall time given to such presentations should be reduced.

As a first-time participant in a WCC assembly, I found myself wondering about the meeting's primary focus. At least three different types of activity could be observed: a number of educational and celebratory events reminiscent of a Christian festival, an open forum or dialogue oriented towards the production of a report, and an administrative board concerned with issues of representation, finance and advocacy. Although none of these activities would necessarily exclude the others they are not necessarily complementary. Since the activities of festival, forum and administration all make an important contribution to the promotion of Christian unity, it may seem unfair to suggest that the assembly ought to have a *primary* focus. Yet without this it is difficult to see how an assembly can give its participants an experience of unity. While it could be argued that the theme provides the integrating focus, it is evident that a theme which can be adapted to any of these three activities does not, of itself, unite them. Participants come to an assembly from diverse backgrounds and with a variety of

expectations. In fact, many participants came to Canberra with very specific and sometimes competing expectations about issues to be addressed. In such a context, the assembly must be clear about its own goals or it risks having its agenda taken over by individual concerns which may not promote the common search for Christian unity.

Education and celebration formed a significant part of the assembly's agenda. Where plenary presentations had a clear educational component, public events such as the opening worship, the Lima liturgy and the "Gathering Under the Southern Cross" combined celebration with education. At the "Gathering Under the Southern Cross", assembly participants had an opportunity to learn through video, pageant and song, how Australians see themselves. It was a spectacular presentation, a tribute to the eighteen months of preparation that had gone into it. The fine weather and picnic setting also allowed participants from around the world to meet some local Australians. For visitors and residents alike, the success of the evening seemed to be measured not only in the sharing of information but also in the strengthening of Christian witness. In fact, in terms of general satisfaction, my conversations with other participants tended to identify these educational and celebratory events as the most successful aspect of the assembly. Further, from the comments of those involved in the accredited visitors' programme, it seems evident that the WCC has developed an expertise in the field of ecumenical education.

### III

For delegates, observers and representatives, a major part of the first week's agenda involved dialogue in sections and sub-sections to explore aspects of the assembly theme. These dialogue groups offered an important opportunity for participants to meet one another, to discuss issues of common concern and to grow in understanding of diverse perspectives. In planning for these sessions, some attention had been given to group dynamics; facilitators were available to assist the dialogue, and moderators were prepared to exercise leadership. In the sub-section in which I participated, the atmosphere was positive and a genuine exchange of ideas was encouraged.

Yet in my view, the process as a whole was flawed. In the first place, it was difficult to know how the preparatory material was to be related to the work of the group. While we were told that what we had received was not definitive, we found that we were unable to change even a word in the title of our sub-section. As sub-section reports began to be integrated into the larger section reports, moreover, new difficulties emerged. In spite of noble efforts by moderator and reporters, it was clearly impossible to reflect the views of the whole group. Working under very stringent time constraints, participants were often able only to state but not to explain their views. In such circumstances, understanding and respect are not easily cultivated. When the section report was presented in plenary session, problems were further compounded. While it is clearly better to "receive" than to "adopt" a report that cannot be amended, those who feel strongly about an issue, who think that a report contains factual error or misrepresents a position, are not likely to want their comments simply appended to that report. Perhaps the most serious difficulty with the process, however, was the problem of showing how the four section reports would be used to give direction to the ongoing work of the WCC. In other words, those who participated in preparing the



section reports wanted some assurance that their efforts would have an actual influence on the life of the Council.

#### IV

When the delegates moved into business sessions during the last days of the assembly, the diversity that appeared to be in dialogue seemed to become increasingly divergent. Insofar as they express a group's choices about the way its members wish to live together, administrative decisions cannot be isolated from dialogue. In fact, administrative decisions may be viewed as a kind of operative theology which tests the theoretical agreements achieved in dialogue.

Thus, when the assembly agreed that certain groups should have specific quotas of representatives included in the central committee, this agreement could be affirmed only through the nominations which come from the churches. Although the nominations committee's failure to achieve the assembly's stated quotas was disappointing, its success in clarifying the member churches' degree of actual agreement with the theoretical decision may have been the most helpful way of identifying the starting point for a new dialogue. Yet, as group after group expressed its disappointment and anger at not being adequately represented on the central committee, a serious lack of confidence in dialogue seemed evident. Specifically, what is the meaning of dialogue when each group feels that it can be represented only by one of its own? While no group's experience is completely transferable, the assumption that some aspects can be understood and shared is integral to dialogue. For many participants, the conflict that emerged during the last few business sessions was very disturbing. If the conflict can be seen not so much as a breakdown of dialogue but as an indication of issues needing to be addressed, then this disturbance might spur us to creative work on the serious problems which this difficult process revealed.

#### V

One aspect of the assembly that I found disappointing was its readiness to make statements about so many diverse issues. In particular, I felt that a number of very complex issues were being addressed from what appeared to be a rather biased perspective. Was the bias indicative of a prophetic stand against injustice? Even after reflection, I remained unsure. Yet I continued to ask whether fidelity to the gospel might not require a clearer recognition of the multi-faceted character of the world in which we live. In the Bible, to be a prophet is to be designated by God to speak the "word of the Lord" to the people. Only those so designated, often after some initial reluctance, are rightly termed prophets. Thus, prophecy implies listening for God's call, being attentive to the "signs of the times" to discern the "word of the Lord" that is to be proclaimed. In my view, the current assembly process does not allow for this kind of listening discernment. And, unless they are intended to be prophetic, the purpose of the many public statements that are made remains unclear.

While the Canberra assembly was not the most satisfying ecumenical event in which I have been involved, I continue to believe that the conciliar process plays an

important role in promoting Christian unity. For this reason, I think the purpose and goal of the assembly should be clarified both in itself and in relation to the WCC agenda as a whole.

To become a more effective means of holding diversity in dialogue, the assembly should have a primary integrating focus. Theoretically, any one of the three activities in which the assembly already is engaged might serve as this focus. In light of the current world situation and the evident need for growth in understanding and respect among diverse groups of people, however, the choice of a dialogue or open forum format could certainly be defended as most expedient. If the forum concept were to become the assembly's primary focus other activities need not be completely eliminated, but those retained would have to be integrated into the broader framework of the dialogue process. The commitment to fostering an open exchange of ideas would become the lens through which all assembly activities would be focused. While a focus on dialogue might appear, at first glance, to be a retreat from action, it could also be seen as a more effective way of ensuring that an action which is called for is based on a real agreement, and thus more likely to be carried out. In an assembly primarily focused on dialogue, voting might be more an affirmation of consensus than an application of majority rule. Participants in this kind of assembly might well feel less disempowered, feel less need to compete with other cultures and traditions, and feel much more able to include non-member churches or other faith groups. Such an assembly might offer a new growth in Christian unity and an opportunity to listen with new ears to what the Spirit wishes to say to the churches.



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# The Promise and the Outcome

*Nicholas Lossky*

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During the preparation of the seventh assembly of the World Council of Churches, many emphasized that the theme chosen was an “Orthodox” theme. “Come, Holy Spirit — Renew the Whole Creation” indeed bears an “epicletic” character. This prayer is close to the one the Orthodox pray at the beginning of every service during most of the liturgical year and an Orthodox will normally begin the day with it: “Come and abide in us and cleanse us from all impurity.” What is more, everyone cognizant with the theological work done in the World Council will remember the unceasing insistence of the Orthodox on the importance of the role of the Holy Spirit in the whole process of salvation, on the essential part played in the eucharist (and other sacramental acts) of the epiclesis (prayer for the sending of the Holy Spirit).

In other words, the Canberra assembly should have filled the Orthodox with nothing but joy and happiness about the fact that at last, here was a chance to speak in “unity of spirit” and therefore move towards the restoration of communion through the confession together of the apostolic faith.

## **Moments of joy**

Now, there certainly have been moments of joy: the joy of meeting so many old and new friends; the joy of praying together in so many different languages and in the forms of different liturgical traditions (this is by far more enriching than the “mixed”, “ad hoc” ecumenical services).

There have also been moments of joy in very serious and encouraging work done together, particularly in the sections and sub-sections. Thus in section III, sub-section 1, where I happened to be, we achieved astonishing convergence and “unity of mind and spirit” among representatives of most cultures (*all* continents were represented) and very diverse Christian traditions, on such a difficult problem as ecclesiological perspectives in a reconciled Christian community.

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● Dr Nicholas Lossky, a professor at the University of Paris X-Nanterre and at the Orthodox Theological Institute of St Sergius, and a member of the WCC’s Faith and Order Commission, attended the assembly as a delegate of the Russian Orthodox Church.

There was the joy occasioned by the massive presence of Christians from countries just awakening to recovered freedom to express their belief in God without having to pay a ransom for this to powers committed to an ungodly, anti-religious ideology. And of course, there was the joy of welcoming new member churches (in particular the Christians from China) and of witnessing their commitment to the constitution of the World Council of Churches.

### **And moments of unease**

Yet the joy in Canberra was not forgetful of some concerns. Now, it must be very strongly emphasized, before anything else is said, that for us Orthodox who have been working in and with the World Council, some of us for many years, the very fact of voicing these concerns is to be understood as an expression of attachment to the World Council on the part of the Orthodox member churches, an expression of the fact that the World Council is taken very seriously by them, that the World Council is truly their own. The rumours that circulated in the “corridors” of the assembly that the Orthodox were about to leave Canberra, if not the World Council altogether, were totally unfounded.

These rumours were at least partly due to the very unfortunate and largely artificial pitting of the Orthodox as representatives of so-called “Northern-hemisphere-Western”, or better “rational”, theology, conservative, if not plainly reactionary, “imperialistic” because bent on imposing their own ways on all, complacently triumphalistic because of their refusal to take part in “eucharistic hospitality”, against an open, lively, “contextual” theology which really speaks to our own day, represented in particular by the Korean theologian Prof. Chung Hyun Kyung. In reality, the conflictual encounter between Prof. Chung and the Orthodox was no more than a minor incident conveniently illustrating how easy it is to caricature Orthodox “primitivism”.

### **Orthodox expectations**

It is important to realize that many Orthodox delegates actually *came* to Canberra with the intention of raising a number of issues concerning the future of the work to be done within the World Council of Churches. Thus, some of the representatives of East European countries had some very serious questions to ask about a redefinition of the goals of the World Council.

Everyone knows and rejoices about the fact that Christians in those countries are now free to rebuild their churches (in more senses than one). But it is perhaps not realized by all that this newly recovered freedom entails new difficulties. (And I do not here mean primarily the questions of human rights among different Christian communities or the financial problems related to the restoration or building of places of worship.)

A major difficulty is paradoxically due to the freedom itself: all are now free to express their views — and thank God for that. But many, especially among the Orthodox, voice, sometimes violently, anti-ecumenical views (close to those we could read on the banners of the “True Orthodox” [“Old-Calendarist”] demonstrators outside the worship tent during the Lima liturgy and during the Orthodox liturgy). These anti-ecumenists get rather wide popular support. Partly, this is due of course to ignorance as to what the ecumenical movement is in reality.



But mainly, it is due to the fact that ecumenical activities are identified in the minds of many with the “arcane” activities of the churches’ leadership, acting in accordance with the “powers that be”. And we all know that during the “dark times”, the civil authorities did not exactly encourage the enlightenment of the masses by the pastors... Hence the ignorance and the suspicion, more often than not supported from abroad, especially with regard to the World Council of Churches which is accused of aiming at “compromising” faithfulness to the gospel of Jesus Christ. It was therefore essential for those who are confronted with these situations to have a clear statement of this faithfulness at Canberra. All the more so as these suspicions are not confined to Eastern Europe: we all know they exist in many parts of the Orthodox world.

What is more, among those Orthodox who, like myself, consider it their bounden duty *as Orthodox* to take an active part in the ecumenical movement and to be seriously committed to the World Council of Churches, there has been a growing feeling that in recent years a certain tendency to drift away from the true vocation of the World Council could be discerned. The central question which the Orthodox *unanimously* felt they had to ask at Canberra was: “Are we, in the World Council, still pursuing the goal which led us, Orthodox, to join (because it is of the very essence of our Orthodoxy, because it is an essential part of our liturgical prayer): the goal of Christian unity, of the restoration of *one* communion, of *one* eucharistic offering of the whole creation?”

### **Communion and confession**

This naturally brings me to the painful question, constantly brought up, of eucharistic sharing in ecumenical gatherings. There is not only one dimension to this question but at least two, and in a sense they are related. It should be clear from what was said above concerning the non-informed, or ill-informed, believers that so long as they are not brought to accept and *receive* that what the ecumenical movement is doing is not a betrayal of the gospel of Jesus Christ but a proclamation thereof, Orthodox participation in “intercommunion” would result in a multiplication of schisms, not in a contribution to the unity of Christians or of humankind.

Those who say that this is no argument, that the time is come, is long overdue, for taking the bold, “prophetic” step, should not forget that one aspect — and a very essential aspect, perhaps the most difficult one — of our ecumenical work is the pastoral task of sharing with “the least of our brethren” the knowledge and understanding that we, the privileged ones who discover one another in and through ecumenical work, have acquired about the growing unity in diversity among the “enemies” of yesterday and among the “strangers” of today.

The other dimension I wish to mention is, for the Orthodox at least, related to the previous one. All those who have any knowledge of the Orthodox are aware of their insistence on the necessity to be able to confess together the apostolic faith in order to be able to restore the unity of communion. Hence the importance in the eyes of the Orthodox of the ongoing apostolic faith study in the Faith and Order Commission.

Some object that even in apostolic times there were different forms of Christianity: Jewish and Gentile. Certainly this is undeniable. But at the same time, the Orthodox insistence on unity of faith is based on the apostolic action described precisely in Acts 15 (the very chapter so often invoked in favour of “pluralism”): before affirming diversity, the apostles verified the catholicity of their common faith in Jesus Christ

(Peter spoke “when there had been much disputation”; “God” he said “which knoweth the hearts”... gave “them the Holy Ghost, even as He did unto us; and put no difference between us and them, purifying their hearts by faith” Acts 15:7-9). Such verification of catholicity has ever been a common practice among local churches (exchange of confessions of faith; plurality of consecrators of a new bishop; mention by the local bishop of the bishops of other local churches which is an affirmation of unity in the catholic faith).

### **Catholicity as the basis of “unity in diversity”**

Now in a truly Orthodox perspective “catholicity” not only has nothing in common with “uniformity”, it is the very basis and expression of “unity in diversity”. Indeed, if the word has acquired the sense of “universality”, it is only as a consequence of its true, primary meaning of “fullness”, of “plenitude” in the faith. This fullness is best expressed, from an authentically Orthodox point of view, by what constitutes the very heart of the gospel: the new life offered in the risen Christ and lived through the grace of the Holy Spirit, that is the divine life in the image of the Holy Trinity. If Christianity, rooted in the incarnation and redemptive work of Christ, has anything *new* to offer, it is this newness of life to be lived and witnessed to “for the salvation of the world”.

“Unity in diversity” is a fashionable phrase in ecumenical circles. Like many phrases used in ecumenical reflection, it tends to be understood differently by people and to be put to different uses. If for some “unity in diversity” means unbridled, limitless pluralism, not only in the manner of living or liturgical practices, but also in Christology, pneumatology, theology and church polity, for others — the Orthodox in particular — the ideal prototype of “unity in diversity” (or “diversity in unity”) is the Holy Trinity. If that is so, the notion is far from permissiveness or limitless pluralism: it is the paradox of *absolute* unity in no less *absolute* diversity. A logical absurdity; a crucifixion for the human mind.

In other words, there is no “easy” unity in diversity. Verification of unity — the confession of “Jesus Christ, the same yesterday, today and for ever” (Heb. 13:8) as “Lord” (= God) and “Saviour” (= crucified, risen, ascended) — will always be necessary, as well as the examination of every form of diversity to make sure that it is not divisive, but always to the edification of the church of God. This implies growing in knowledge of others and of oneself: exchange of confessions of faith and permanent conversion. It is a dynamic process of growing into a unity which does not destroy the existence of persons — *persons, not* individuals; a person is the being *by definition* in communion — and a diversity which does not break the “fellowship”, the *koinonia* or *communion* of these persons.

### **The question of participation**

This concerns among other things the much-vexed question of the full participation in church life of diverse groups which consider themselves excluded or marginalized. Many feel that they are not admitted to the decision-making functions which wield power. This calls for three remarks.

1. The Founder of our church community, the “King of kings and the Lord of lords”, has invited us to imitate him: “Ye call me Master and Lord: and ye say well; for so I am.... I have given you an example, that ye should do as I have done to you”



(John 13:13,15). This *should* mean that in the church there is no room for power (*authority*, there is, but it is the authority of *God*, not of man), no domination-submission but only ministry, *diaconia*, mutual service, mutual “washing of feet”.

2. This in its turn *should* mean that quite obviously absolutely *no one* can be regarded as marginal for *any* reason whatsoever within the new community in Christ (Judas excluded himself by not accepting that even *his* sin was forgiven).

3. Trying to obtain recognition by the *human*, and therefore sinful, “organizational”, “institutional” church (in the bad sense of the word “institutional”), is perfectly understandable and legitimate: it is a call for conversion within this “institutional” church.

However, there is a serious danger, in my opinion, in organized groups claiming recognition as *groups*: the danger is of conceiving the church community as a conglomeration of “pressure groups”, with common interests to fight for or to defend, as in a purely human political society, whose categories are those of “this world”, and not as a community of *persons* gathered together in the name of Jesus Christ to learn to live *at least among themselves* according to the categories of the Beatitudes so that the world might “believe”, that is receive at least something of these “renewed” criteria.

### **Gospel and culture**

Unity in diversity — or diversity in unity: it is theologically dangerous to conceive of the one as preceding the other — also concerns the problem of gospel and culture. The Orthodox have always been deeply attached to the principle of the legitimacy of the multiplicity of cultures (at least in principle, for due to human weakness, there sometimes have been tendencies to impose a cultural form together with the preaching of the gospel). On the whole, the history of Orthodox evangelization and missions (the Slavs, Alaskan Indians, Japanese) bears witness to the fact that Orthodoxy, when faithful to itself, believes that *every* culture is called to receive the good news of the Risen Christ offering the gift of the Holy Spirit, and to express this gospel in its own unique way. But this implies a necessary transformation of this culture so that it may be transfigured: it has to convert to the gospel, to receive baptism, to become “ecclesialized” (if these apparent trivialities will be excused).

Concretely, this does not mean that it has to learn Greek or Latin. It means that it has to struggle to do away within itself with all elements “of this world” which are incompatible with the confession of the apostolic faith. It also means that it is called to become a culture in communion with other cultures. Therefore, it cannot remain closed upon itself and should not spend its time and energy jealously defending its own individual identity, instead of striving to become an open “communicant” of the “conciliar fellowship of churches” united in “reconciled diversity”.

One final point. The famous contest between so-called “rational” theology (I honestly wonder what this means) and so-called “contextual” theology (which I understand to mean theology — the gospel announced within a cultural, geographic, historical environment) appears to be largely a misunderstanding. It seems to me that if “rational” theology means theology concocted entirely within the categories of human reason, it is no theology at all. Christian theology, like Jewish theology, is the people of God’s reply to the call of the God of Abraham, of Isaac and of Jacob in the burning bush. It is therefore an ecclesial or “catholic” theology, a confessing and doxological theology, which represents an attempt to express for today the ecclesial experience of

God. It is a theology which attempts to speak today in unanimity with the “clouds of witnesses” of all times, since “the Spirit is one”. If this ecclesial, non-individualistic theology really and seriously attempts to speak *today*, in our own time, this necessarily means “in each place”. In one word, theology worthy of the name is necessarily contextual, and contextual does not mean, or *should* not mean, cut off from our Fathers in the faith, starting from Abraham, or from our actual or potential brothers and sisters in the faith today.



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# From an African Angle

*Ambrose Moyo*

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The seventh assembly of the World Council of Churches, which I was privileged to attend as an observer representing the Conference of African Theological Institutions, was held at a very critical moment not only in the history of Africa but of the world as a whole. The dark shadow of the Gulf war loomed very heavily over the assembly and added a sense of urgency to the discussion of the theme, “Come, Holy Spirit — Renew the Whole Creation”, and of all issues relating to “Justice, Peace and the Integrity of Creation”. However, those of us who came from Africa did not need the Gulf war to hear the groans from God’s creation and to be reminded of the grim realities of human misery and suffering as a result of unjust social, economic and political systems.

Africa is experiencing a series of crises such as economies that are near collapse, internal conflicts, civil wars, and human right abuses (all of which have produced an unprecedented number of displaced persons), serious ecological problems due to extensive deforestation and unpredictable weather patterns. The suffering caused by Africa’s indebtedness to the rich North has reached intolerable proportions, and the struggle against hunger, ignorance and disease continues unabated, with no end in sight. All these are existential realities which many of the African delegates to the assembly will continue to experience daily when they return to their home countries from Canberra.

The assembly with its Spirit theme, therefore, provided an appropriate forum to reflect on these and other issues, and to seek the guidance of the Holy Spirit as Christians from all over the world lived and reflected together, as one people of God, on their own contribution to the suffering to which human beings have subjected God’s creation, and on what they can do together as a Christian family, under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, to renew that creation, beginning with their own renewal. The experience of being able to share concerns and to worship together as Christians from different geographical and cultural backgrounds and the unity of the many different tongues in the worship of God in that huge tent were truly memorable, the latter indeed a foretaste of that eschatological heavenly community gathered to give eternal praise to the almighty God. In other words the worship services were a joyful experience and moments of glorification for the church of Christ.

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## I

“Spirit of Unity — Reconcile your People!” Reconciliation is what Africa and the world as a whole are yearning for. Our divisions and our conflicts are very real. To overcome those conflicts and divisions it is necessary to lay them at the ecumenical table and seek solutions together as brothers and sisters. The assembly grappled seriously in the different sections with those issues that make life miserable for God’s creation. Our pre-assembly meetings helped to highlight some of those issues so that they could be on the agenda of the assembly. Most of the issues that are of specific concern to Africa were indeed raised, as is clear from the assembly’s statement on internal conflicts although it does not mention any country by name. Regrettably, the Gulf war, because of its threat to world peace and ecology, did not leave room for discussions or for the plenary to listen to testimonies from individuals from other parts of the world where people are experiencing a great deal of pain as a result of internal and external conflicts. In other words, the Gulf war denied members from other regions the opportunity to testify to the groans of God’s creation in their regions. The devastating civil wars in Africa (Liberia, Ethiopia, The Sudan, Mozambique, to mention only a few), apartheid in South Africa, and other situations where people are dying in their thousands, could have helped to underline the importance of the current discussions on justice, peace and the integrity of creation. Apartheid continues to be a challenge to the church as we seek a truly non-racial and democratic society in South Africa, and a discussion of the issue in plenary was important to allow the world body to hear the testimonies of South Africans as to how they interpret the current developments in that country in order to enable the delegates to influence their governments back home on the question of sanctions.

The Gulf war was indeed an important concern to the entire world community as its effects are felt worldwide, and more so in developing countries as their economic situations have further declined due to increases in fuel prices and sharp rises in the cost of living. However, the implications of spending that much time on it at the expense of other issues that seriously affect human life and ecology in other parts of the world reflected an unbalanced or partial approach on the part of the assembly to the unity of creation and the global character of its groans. That not much time was spent in plenary discussing specific third-world concerns is a clear reminder that as a Christian fellowship we very much need to listen to the weak voices of the oppressed everywhere, and allow these soft voices to make their own contribution to the agenda of world bodies such as the WCC. “Come, Holy Spirit — Renew the Whole Creation” is a prayer not only for the victims of the Gulf war but for the entire creation and for all the marginalized everywhere. What I am saying is that there was a need for greater concreteness in dealing with the theme of the assembly and to focus on specific examples of the violations of justice, peace and the integrity of creation from different parts of the world.

## II

The African delegates often felt frustrated as they sought to be heard, and tried to express their opinion on matters affecting them, and felt humiliated by the “powers” demanding that things be done their own way.



“Spirit of Truth — Set us Free!” is a prayer to be set free to hear the voices of the poor and the weak, and to allow them, under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, to set their own priorities. The Spirit of God challenges all of us, particularly the powerful, to hear each other’s voice, to share God’s power and in that process be renewed together with all of God’s creation. God has graciously shared his power with humanity and challenges us to use that power to sustain God’s creation. God’s power is given to liberate and not to oppress.

The Christian is called to a life of sharing. This came out clearly in some section reports. An understanding of the church as a communion, *koinonia*, of men and women brought together through the calling of the Triune God, demands sharing our lives and all the resources available with other members of the communion. Perhaps most important is the affirmation that “*koinonia* in the Holy Spirit is based on sharing in the life of the Trinitarian God and is expressed by sharing life within the community”. On hearing these statements and listening to the discussions, one is left wondering whether the member churches of the WCC have moved close enough to each other to understand the WCC as a communion, and the theological and practical implications of such an understanding for their relationships with one another. Failure to share in the eucharist and to recognize each other’s baptism and ministry militates against true *koinonia*. The seventh assembly has not brought us closer to removing the pain of being divided as some members of the WCC and other members of the Christian family outside the WCC still find it difficult to recognize in other churches these basic elements of Christian *koinonia* based on the confession of Jesus Christ as Lord and Saviour. It is regrettable that not much time was given to a serious discussion of the *Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry* (BEM) document.

### III

Discussion of the sub-theme “Spirit of Unity — Reconcile your People!” provided insights into our understanding of mission as Christians. The unity that we seek brings together people of different cultural and religious backgrounds. Each member brings unique gifts to share with other members of the *koinonia*. Of significance is the fact that the seventh assembly found it appropriate within its theme to reaffirm the fact that there are others in the world who also claim to have an understanding of the truth about God and the created world and need special attention in a manner different from the traditional Christian approaches to peoples of other faiths. The renewal of creation implies a renewal of our relationships with those people as well. Mission should be understood as a sharing of our faith with others who are also at liberty to share their faith with us. In a world where religious conflict has produced many wars, the sharing of our faith with one another can lead to reconciliation as we understand each other, and to conversion.

The implication of this affirmation is that the Triune God can “look after himself” and does not need to be protected by the Christian. God expresses God’s nature in many different ways and the people of other faiths may also have some truth about God which they can share with us to the benefit of all humanity. Often Christians feel the need to protect God and the gospel from cultures. I understand the discussions at the assembly to mean that our task as Christians is to be open to the different ways in

which the Holy Spirit expresses the truth about God and calls people into the Christian family, to discern the workings of the Spirit in other religions, in national, social, economic and political programmes, and to open ourselves for reconciliation with all of God's creation including people of other faiths. This does not mean Christians have to be "syncretistic", although early Christianity was in many ways syncretistic; it means that they should allow Christ to speak in and through the religious languages and symbols provided in cultures. This allows for different cultural expressions of the same gospel of Christ. The unity that we seek can only be unity in diversity, but must in all its diversity proclaim Jesus Christ as the Son of God and the Saviour of the world. This was clearly expressed in one of the committee reports when it stated that as Christians "we seek to witness to the truth that salvation is in Christ, but also to remain open to other people's expressions of truth".

The implications of such an affirmation can be far-reaching, particularly for us in Africa. One African delegate rightly commented that this means that the gospel will need to be re-preached in Africa. The report further observed that "some of the ways in which the gospel has been imposed on particular cultures require repentance and healing". The gospel needs to be rooted in our cultures and the need in Africa is to allow the Spirit to lead its people to rediscover those aspects of culture which can meaningfully serve the cause of the gospel. It is, however, also crucial to recognize that what we need is not to remove segments of our cultures and label others as "heathen", but to let Christ enter into the whole culture, die in it, and in that death renew it in his own way in order to rise victorious in it. In this way Christ will be firmly rooted in a people's culture, and he will become the essence of their religious beliefs and practices. This allows Christ to permeate all aspects of a people's life, so that in the end the Western distinction of the "sacred" and the "profane" will cease to exist. The whole world belongs to God and, when praying: "Spirit of Unity — Reconcile your People!" the plea is for the total renewal of a people, and for such renewal there must also be a renewal of culture, which includes a people's world-view and their relationships to and their understandings of the whole created universe. This is the kind of unity and reconciliation for which God in Christ suffered on the cross.

The affirmation of our cultural differences and the fact that these differences should be viewed as a source of strength was very refreshing, but it also comes as a challenge for all to bring to the ecumenical table those gifts that each member of the community has uniquely received from God to share with all the people of God. The WCC will, we hope, through its programmes assist member churches, particularly those who have suffered from the cultural domination of the West, to reflect critically and meaningfully on what it means to be Christians within their cultural context and how to take Christ into their cultures for challenge and renewal.

#### IV

Islam poses a serious problem to Christians in some parts of Africa south of the Sahara. Canberra says that our option should not be for confrontation but for dialogue. Dialogue does not mean conceding defeat, but engaging in mission: "Dialogue is an authentic form of Christian witness and ministry. As Christians we affirm the Holy Spirit counselling us to keep faith, to encounter the other, and to hold fast to the



revealed Christ.” Some members of the African delegation expressed hesitations on this particular approach to mission. They were speaking from the experience of having to suffer because of their faith as they live under Muslim-dominated governments. They feel weak and believe that dialogue will only be possible when the dominating religious group in their societies has seen the benefits of such an approach and what it means for justice, peace and the integrity of creation. The WCC must be commended for bringing representatives of people of other faiths to participate at the assembly. Their presence in Canberra was a reminder of our mission and the need to seek new ways of carrying on that mission. However, in order to allow for a meaningful participation and exchange, it is important that the representatives of people of other faiths be leaders who command the respect of the groups that they represent.

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# Are the Orthodox that far Apart?

*Valerie Zahirsky*

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The Canberra assembly really caught up with me two days after it was over, on a public tour bus in Sydney. I almost asked an interesting-looking stranger “What church are you from?”, a question that had been as common as rainwater on the buses we frequented for nearly three weeks. I stopped myself just in time to avoid social embarrassment; there were, of course, no WCC badges on this bus’s riders to make such a personal question acceptable. There was no assumed sharing of purpose and commitment to make the question welcome.

What unique freedom those badges had offered us during our days together! They had let us meet each other simply and informally, and get on quite soon — much sooner than in more impersonal social situations — to conversations of real depth and meaning. At outdoor tables, on gritty campus walking paths, in dormitory courtyards, people talked theology, shared opinions about plenary presentations, learned about each other’s church practices and beliefs.

The chance for such conversations is one of an assembly’s greatest gifts to its participants. Just being there means you already have something in common; that doesn’t need to be searched for. People are not reticent to talk about things of faith because that is partly what they came for, eager to discuss the deeply-felt things that in superficial society are generally off-limits for discussion. As a result of our conversations we test our own ideas and opinions as we learn from each other’s experience and knowledge. (Over the dinner table one evening I found out more about what Unitarianism is and isn’t than I had known in my whole life.) We come up against challenges to our understandings. Sometimes we find compatible people who know just how we feel about things because they feel the same. Even more important, through such conversations other people’s churches come to have faces. After Canberra, reading or hearing the name of a church in another country will call to mind the faces of its representatives at the assembly. That church’s activities, its welfare, will have importance to us in a way they could not have before. In such unmeasured, undocumented ways is the sense of community built among Christians.

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● Mrs Zahirsky was an assembly delegate from the Orthodox Church in America. She had her theological education at St Vladimir’s Orthodox Seminary in Crestwood, NY, USA.



Those WCC badges we wore may have freed us from certain constraints, but sometimes it seemed that they imposed others on those of us whose badges included the word “Orthodox”. Most people were friendly, and interested in knowing more about what it meant to be Orthodox — particularly Orthodox and female. There were many who had knowledge of Orthodoxy already and showed a generous appreciation of the faith. But that word “Orthodox” seemed to engender a certain guardedness, a wariness, in some people, and from a few there was a tinge of actual hostility. The reason for these attitudes is always the same — the Orthodox stand alone in many ways.

### **Women in the church**

We are, first of all, the ones who do not ordain women to the priesthood. That is the difference most who are not Orthodox seem to see, but in Canberra I saw another. As part of the pre-assembly women’s meeting we had a well-prepared Bible study that outlined Eve’s place in Western theology as being the source of all sin, and the Virgin Mary as an impossible ideal. The Bible study emphasized the need for modern women to rethink these two images in order to make a place where they can “fit” in the church, since the images do not offer them such a place.

It is certainly true that if women have been caught between two such unhelpful images, there really is no place for them. But in Orthodox theology, Eve is blamed equally with Adam, not as the source of sin. This reflects the usual Orthodox approach to woman-man relationships, that they are co-beings who complete each other and cannot be whole without each other. Eve is also lauded as the “Mother of all Living”. In icons of the resurrection, Christ is shown pulling her and Adam, with his two crucified hands, out of the gates of hell and into the kingdom. Her destiny is a glorious one, not an everlasting condemnation.

As for the Virgin Mary, the constant celebration in Orthodoxy of her “yes” to God is based precisely on the fact that she is not an impossible ideal. Born as we are, not immaculately conceived, her free choice to follow God’s will is one that we all can make. She shows what is possible for humans — to bring about the fulfilment of God’s own plan! — and so we praise and revere her as the one who exemplifies what every man, woman and child can be.

Might it be that Orthodox women see, in their own theology, places where they can fit? Might the difference between the Orthodox church and the Western churches be a difference in theology that makes the Orthodox feel less driven to seek ordination? Because the issue is vitally important to so many women (and men) in World Council member churches, a deeper discussion of it must be part of future work. A clear, thorough elucidation of Orthodox teaching about women can be the starting point.

There is also another aspect to this discussion, one that was given welcome attention in the assembly section reports. This is the need to explore the variety of possible new or renewed ministries for women in the churches, not limited to ordination. Such an exploration will be important for the WCC, first because member churches all need these ministries, and also because ministries that women in all faith confessions can share will be uniting rather than divisive.

### **Christianity expressed through cultures**

The report of section III contained in its first draft a phrase about the need for cultures to be “transformed, renewed and corrected” by the gospel. The word

“corrected” was objectionable to some, and in the second draft it was removed, only to reappear in the version finally submitted by the Report Committee. The ambivalence about this word reflects ambivalence about the whole question of cultural inclusiveness, and it became a nettlesome question during the assembly. Again the Orthodox found themselves in what was apparently a minority position (though they were not alone, for members of other churches agreed) in insisting that not just any element of a culture can be named “Christian” and safely incorporated into Christian understanding. There were accusations that the minority position limited the freedom of the Holy Spirit and failed to respect indigenous cultures.

Yet the Orthodox have long experience with witness in indigenous cultures — most of us have heard the Easter hymn in at least a dozen languages and musical styles — and that witness has been made not through imposition of a dominant culture but by respecting the culture of the people. In many places, those who are already Orthodox have been vigorously proselytized by Christians of other faith confessions. The Orthodox, thus, have been victims rather than perpetrators of “cultural imposition” and perhaps are not so ready to accept blame for their own style of missionary work.

The issue of cultural inclusiveness in mission will be significant as WCC membership expands, and especially as the effort at dialogue with other faiths widens. The Orthodox should be ready, and encouraged, to contribute the results of their witness in various cultures as the issue is debated and resolved.

### **Theology and the eucharist**

The most excruciatingly difficult moment of the assembly came for me during what is usually the best moment that recurs in my life: the partaking of holy communion during the Orthodox divine liturgy that was celebrated in the worship tent. To look around the tent and see wonderful new friends made over the past few weeks who now would not be sharing the eucharist was devastating. Equally wrenching were some of the comments one could overhear later: “exclusivity”, “lack of Christian love”, “refusal of the Lord’s gifts”, directed against the Orthodox.

For most Orthodox, the burden of this eucharistic division is a real *martyria*. It often calls forth such accusations against the Orthodox, and in trying to answer them we realize that the whole ecclesiological understanding of Orthodoxy is being called into question. How is it possible to explain that the eucharist is another thing the church does together, as one body, “with one mind” as the divine liturgy puts it? How do we show that our attitude is not one of intransigence but of attempted faithfulness to God’s own revelation? How do we help people see that when the day comes that we really are all of one mind, it will be manifested by the fact that we are all in the same church? And when that day comes, the shared eucharist will be the crown and celebration of our unity. But until it comes, we must hash out our differences, so that it *can* come. We must talk theology seriously and deeply with each other.

The readiness to talk theology seriously, despite some memorable private conversations, was not evident in the assembly as a whole. Of course it is not just a problem of the assembly. In a report to an international conference of Orthodox theologians in Brookline, Massachusetts, in 1970, Fr Alexander Schmemmann wrote about the status of theology in the Orthodox church:



In our church today, professional theologians constitute a kind of *Lumpenproletariat* and, what is even more tragic, seem to be reconciled to this status. Theology is no longer the conscience and consciousness of the church, her reflection on herself and on her problems. It has ceased to be *pastoral* in the sense of providing the church with essential and saving norms; and it has also ceased to be *mystical* in the sense of communicating to the people of God the knowledge which is the very content of life eternal.

Even Fr Schmemmann's use of the pronoun "she" to refer to the Church (with the capital C) points up another of the ways in which the Orthodox seemed to stand alone at the assembly. For Orthodox this customary use of "she" is a sign that the church is the pure and spotless Bride of Christ the Bridegroom, offering herself to him. Our attempt is always to become worthy of that offering by spiritual effort in every area of our lives. It is, I think, still jarring for most Orthodox to hear the church (small c) referred to as "it" and accused of all sorts of essential sinfulness. At times in Canberra I felt a sense of desolation: are we really that far apart in the way we see the church (Church)?

But we have the gift of language, and the gift of being brought together. The future calls us to use those gifts to come to deeper understanding of what it means to be part of the "one, holy, catholic and apostolic church" and how our participation in the common eucharist is related to all that. The willingness to thrash out our theological differences and conceptions, in the manner of the early ecumenical councils, is the key to the true communion we all pray and long for.

Is it presumptuous to believe the Orthodox have something particular to offer to this process? I think not, for in the January 1991 issue of *The Ecumenical Review* two tantalizing references are made to such a possibility by writers who are not Orthodox. Lesslie Newbigin writes in his article "A Missionary's Dream" that the Orthodox presence is a "great resource" for the WCC. Patrick J. Henry notes in "From Breakthrough to Breakthrough" that a pan-Orthodox council, if it were to take place, could have a significance for other churches that would be "no less momentous" than that of Vatican II.

Of course, such hopes place a great responsibility on the Orthodox. We need to continue trying to find a theological language that is commonly understood, to be clear and to the point in what we say and request, and to be open to the hearing of all other voices, while always "speaking the truth in love". Can we do it? Can the whole WCC as a body help us do it, and willingly receive its fruits? We have to believe, if we are believers at all, that God will enable us to do it when it is done in his name. He will answer our prayer when we cry from our hearts, "Come, Holy Spirit!"

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# Ecumenical Moments

*Michael E. Putney*

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It is not possible to write a detailed theological assessment of the Canberra assembly and its impact on the ecumenical movement during the very busy days of the assembly itself. Therefore I have chosen to describe a number of moments during the assembly which made a deep impression on me and which led to further reflection on the WCC and on the ecumenical movement. Each of these moments came to mind again as reports were being received or amended during the last two days, because the reports touched on the issues with which I had already been dealing.

## I

The report of the Reference Committee presented to the assembly contained a very important restatement of the goal of Christian unity. It was entitled “The Unity of the Church as Koinonia: Gift and Calling”. One of its recommendations reads as follows: “to recommit themselves to work for justice, peace and the integrity of creation, linking more closely the search for the sacramental communion of the church with the struggles for justice and peace”. This addressed the unease I had been feeling since the second day of the assembly, and especially since the address of Mary Tanner on the third sub-theme, “Spirit of Unity — Reconcile Your People!”

There had been scattered applause during her presentation when she said that the concern she had been outlining for the unity of the church should not be separated from a search for justice and peace. Again there was scattered applause when she reversed this and called for a linking of any commitment to mending the world with a commitment to work for the unity of the church. What was at issue here had been very graphically illustrated in the preceding plenary session when the opening addresses on the theme were given by Patriarch Parthenios of Alexandria and Dr Chung Hyun Kyung of Korea.

Patriarch Parthenios’s presentation might well have been sub-titled with his statement: “When we speak about the Holy Spirit, we are speaking about the Holy Trinity.” Dr Chung’s paper could easily have been sub-titled with her concluding appeal: “Let

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● The Rev. Fr Michael E. Putney, vice-rector and lecturer in systematic theology at Pius XII Seminary, Brisbane, Australia, was at the assembly as a Roman Catholic delegated observer.



us participate in the Holy Spirit's political economy of Life fighting for our life on this earth in solidarity with all living beings, and building communities for justice, peace and the integrity of creation." Patriarch Parthenios emphasized that the Holy Trinity is working for the unity of the church, but also that "our ministry in the Holy Spirit" is to work for the freedom of all peoples, the unity of the whole world and the wholeness of creation. Dr Chung explored the experience of the Holy Spirit in the struggle of people for liberation and on behalf of the life and beauty of nature. She also made a reference to the Spirit establishing the church as a liberative community. One moved from the Holy Trinity to the unity of the church and thence to its commitment to justice, peace and the integrity of creation. The other spoke about the struggle for justice, peace and the integrity of creation and described this as the work of the Holy Spirit.

People applauded both papers, but the priority of some became clear during Dr Tanner's later presentation. They apparently felt moved to applaud when she finally linked her concern for the unity of the church to their concern for justice and peace. Others then apparently felt moved to respond to this by applauding when she reversed the order. Two tendencies, two theological priorities, were obvious in the presentations and on almost every day of the assembly. Two groups of participants with vastly different priorities and often passionate commitment to these became apparent from that point on. These two tendencies can probably be traced as far back as the original founding movements of the WCC, Faith and Order and Life and Work. They have always been present in the WCC and within its members churches. One wonders whether the difference between them could have been more vividly revealed than in the opening sessions of the Canberra assembly.

My concern as the days moved on was that these tendencies were beginning to diverge so considerably from each other that it could become increasingly difficult to hold them together in the one ecumenical movement. Commitment to working for the unity of the church and commitment to the renewal of the whole creation are both fundamental dimensions of the Christian life. But they are related to each other and must be seen to be so. If they are not brought together and their interconnectedness emphasized at all times, churches, or groups within churches, could begin to draw apart from each other. This would lay the foundation for new divisions within the ecumenical movement. The WCC ought to be ideally placed to draw these tendencies together. It did not really achieve that in Canberra. If anything, it more than ever revealed their divergence.

However there is a small sign of hope. The newly released Faith and Order study *Church and World: The Unity of the Church and the Renewal of Human Community* could be interpreted as an overture from that sub-unit to other sub-units within the WCC, to draw their priorities together in a common ecumenical quest. If the efforts of others to further the project of "Justice, Peace and the Integrity of Creation" were to be concentrated in turn on establishing a Trinitarian, ecclesiological and eucharistic foundation for that project, then the future would be a lot more hopeful. Concern for the unity of the church cannot be divorced from the concern for the whole of humanity. Concern for justice and peace must be related to the church if it is to claim a foundation in God's plan for this world because the church is part of that plan. The Canberra assembly must be the last occasion on which these diverging tendencies are polarized rather than reconciled. Too much is at stake to let them diverge any further.

## II

The report of the Reference Committee also referred to the need for developing further “a vital and coherent theology” within the WCC. This brought to mind another moment in the life of the assembly which had raised real questions for me. On Saturday afternoon a special deliberative plenary session had been held to discuss the paper given eight days before by Chung Hyun Kyung. There had been much debate about the danger of syncretism, in the dining halls and on the pathways. Many good points were made by participants as the debate progressed but it was Dr Chung herself who named the issue most clearly in the final contribution of the day. She made a passionate plea for a form of liberation and contextual theology over against what had come to be called “traditional” theology in the debate. In doing so she named the issue as one of criteria. What are the criteria for authentic Christian theology and where are they to be found? In the tradition (controlled by men)? In the experience of the poor and marginalized? Unfortunately a polarization again seemed to take place in the assembly hall. There was little real dialogue and certainly no reconciliation. Whatever a “vital and coherent theology” means it will be valueless unless it can address this major divergence in theological method. Part of the divergence occurring between the two tendencies in WCC and ecumenical theology in general is clearly also a divergence over theological method. The debate about method, criteria and hermeneutics in general is taking place right across the theological world. It seems to have reached a rather sharp focus within the WCC itself and hence that body ought to be well placed to deal with it in a constructive way. It will not be easy, but unless it does so, further polarization will be the likely result. The Canberra assembly again has highlighted an urgent need confronting the ecumenical movement and the WCC. It is a heartening sign that the Committee on Programme Policy seems to have recognized this urgency, for it has asked that the quest for “a vital and coherent theology” remain a policy. Moreover, it has recognized that “it is important to bring contextual theologies into dialogue with classical theologies in order to develop an ecumenical theology”.

## III

In its response to the general secretary’s report, the report of the Reference Committee expressed the wish that “Canberra should be the last assembly with a divided eucharist”. This brought to mind my own experience at the celebration of the Lima liturgy on the first Sunday of the assembly. I had remained seated with another Roman Catholic and three Orthodox while everyone else in our section had gone forward to receive communion. That was a fairly demanding experience for me. I had never before participated in a celebrated eucharist with so many people from so many Christian traditions taking part. It was painful to stand apart and I presume it was painful for people to see me doing so. However, I could not go forward. My inability did not result simply from my own church’s discipline but rather from within myself. Deep within my Catholic consciousness is the conviction that what I was observing was something like what I was striving for in the ecumenical movement. I have no other goal than to participate in one common eucharist. If I could do what my brothers and sisters were doing, then it would be enough for me, because it would mean that so



much had been resolved. It would mean, as the statement “The Unity of the Church as Koinonia: Gift and Calling” put it, that we were “able to recognize in one another the One, Holy, Catholic and Apostolic Church in its fullness”. It would mean, therefore, as the same statement outlined it, that we had a “common confession of the apostolic faith” and “a common life in which members and ministries are mutually recognized and reconciled”. Because this is not yet true, despite the immense achievement of the Faith and Order commission and the bilateral dialogues, I could not go forward to receive communion without trampling on one of my deepest convictions as a Catholic participant in the ecumenical movement.

My only unhappy experiences during a rich and exciting two weeks in Canberra were when other people became angry with me because of my Catholic understanding of the significance of intercommunion. That we should think differently about intercommunion is normal, but that one approach to intercommunion should be equated with genuine ecumenism and the other condemned as unecumenical is unacceptable. So what does the wish of the Reference Committee mean for Canberra to be the last assembly with a divided eucharist? If it means that we should resolve those issues which still keep us apart as divided communions, then it may be a little too optimistic — but nonetheless the hope of all of us. If it means that churches whose members did not take full part in the Lima liturgy must change their understanding of intercommunion, then it asks too much of some churches. Were it an invitation to continue to dialogue on our differing understandings of this question so that we might learn from each other and at least reduce the tension generated by this issue at ecumenical gatherings, then it would have been a timely invitation and would have won a ready response from many churches.

#### IV

This minor tension caused by the ever-recurring issue of intercommunion was the only blemish in an otherwise marvellous two weeks for a Roman Catholic participant in a WCC assembly. The welcome given the Roman Catholic delegation moved us all very deeply. The serious and sincere discussion of the Joint Working Group report and the recommendations for its future activity were a cause for real hope that relations in the future might be even better than they are in the present. It is time to undertake the review recommended of the present relationship between the WCC and the RCC and to “analyze more deeply the obstacles which have prevented the relationships from developing even more fully”. Bishop Alan Clark, co-chairman of the Joint Working Group, spoke of discovering in a positive way what is actually involved in the communion which already exists between the RCC and the member churches of the WCC, imperfect though it be. Whatever the shape of the WCC will be in the future, given the present plans to undertake some restructuring, it must enable it to fulfill even more effectively the goal outlined again for it in the report of the Committee on Programme Policy: “The primary task of the WCC is to call the churches to the goal of visible unity in the context of the unity of humankind, through programmes that foster reconciliation and healing.” As long as that remains its goal, deeper and deeper involvement of the RCC is inevitable because it is committed to walking in partnership with the member churches of the WCC towards that common goal: “visible unity in the context of the unity of humankind”.

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# Communicating Canberra

*Gordon Gray*

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Canberra was for me personally a very welcome return to the fellowship of the World Council of Churches. I realize that the Council is officially a “fellowship of churches”. But this can only have real meaning if it is expressed through contact and friendship between persons. Such contact is validly the core of an assembly; it is not merely a spin-off or fringe benefit.

In one sense friendships made at international ecumenical gatherings are like holiday romances; delightful precisely because they do not involve the risk of ongoing close encounter. But it has been my experience that deep, enduring and sustaining relationships can grow out of international ecumenical gatherings. And for those appointed to central and other committees and commissions the sense of being a partner in a movement, a member of a living body, can become very real indeed through periodic meetings. The very fact that working groups and commissions normally meet residentially for several days means that members may well spend far more time and more personal time discussing, chatting, relating together, though living continents apart, than they do with most fellow/sister clergy or lay representatives of their own national church. Moreover, once the truly ecumenical vision takes hold of a person there can be a great sense of sharing with kindred spirits in a magnificent enterprise — urgent, positive, prophetic — whereas so much about the local church (i.e. national denomination or individual congregation) can seem petty, sterile and wedded to the status quo (of course there can also be pettiness in international ecumenical gatherings of the great and good!). Where that is the case locally, then the experience of “church” in its global dimension, and engagement in discussion of its global calling, together with the sharing of others’ stories from their particular situations, can enrich one’s own local ministry. It can renew one’s conviction and sense of call, and indeed put in a different perspective the frustrations and problems, even at times the dangers or opposition, with which one may have to deal in day-to-day ministry.

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● The Rev. Gordon Gray, minister of the First Lisburn Presbyterian Church in Northern Ireland, UK, was a member of the co-opted staff of the Communication Department at the assembly.



## I

This certainly was my experience of and through the WCC until my church, the Presbyterian Church in Ireland, withdrew in 1980. Thereafter the sense of being an exile was intense — an exile from the wider oikoumene, an alien within my own church. The Presbyterian Church in Ireland is a noble church with a fine tradition of ecumenical involvement and leadership, now under the sway of a majority opposed to official ecumenical councils, suspicious of their agendas and fearful of betraying evangelical truth by compromise. Gradually thereafter my personal links with the WCC largely disappeared. But I was not alone in my discomfiture. Many of us in the Presbyterian Church in Ireland have felt increasingly isolated from the main streams of the Christian church, and thereby spiritually diminished. Accordingly attendance at the seventh assembly was for me as refreshing as it was surprising. Perhaps I may be permitted an exhortation: cherish your ecumenical links; own your council; do not take it for granted.

That means becoming now the WCC's advocate and interpreter back home. Canberra should not be a private experience, enjoyed and forgotten amidst the agendas that await at the coal-face. Each Canberra participant should see themselves now as a voluntary part of the WCC's communications team.

That is not easy, as I know to my cost. In August 1978 the grants to liberation movements in South Africa through the Programme to Combat Racism were suddenly announced by the World Council. In Ireland, where we were in the throes of a terrorist campaign, as we still are, this action was, not unnaturally, interpreted in the worst possible light. The problem for those of us involved directly with the WCC was that we had been given no advance notice and no specific background information to enable us to interpret the new programme thrust sympathetically. We were at the mercy of the public press, and its often biased interpretation.

## II

This time I have been a member of the communications team, co-opted as a photographer to produce the slide-tape set of the assembly. I find myself wondering how extensively it will be used. But that is just one aspect of the wider issue. Just as an assembly is, in my view, primarily a myriad personal contacts, so the communication of what it has been and accomplished will happen primarily through persons — persons rather than documents. For communication is a personal thing.

Photography is about communicating. I hope to convey in a picture not only what I have seen and observed but what I have felt; that is, to "say" something. Of course, when photography is matched to music and voice its function as communication becomes even clearer. Still photography (i.e. as opposed to video, for instance — and I am not scorning video, not at all) at its best captures in one split second a story, a person, a message.

So an assembly is often summed up and best expressed by its "moments" — small, fleeting happenings, often deeply personal, that somehow encapsulate a world of meaning and significance.

I think of Dorothy McMahon and her gracious, tear-filled acknowledgment before the whole assembly of the part she had inadvertently played in causing hurt to Aboriginal friends the previous evening; the way she was supported, emotionally and physically, by those around her as she stood in that otherwise lonely place; and then the healing moment of communion. That surely was for many a powerful revelation of the dynamics of the gospel and Christian response. Equally one has to note the graciousness and nobility of the Aboriginals' response in accepting her expression of contrition and sorrow.

Another deeply moving moment came later in the assembly when general secretary Emilio Castro gave to the Aboriginals, in their plenary presentation on the issue of land rights for indigenous peoples, a gift that had entailed the surrender of a sentimentally and actually precious memento of his mother. That which is most personal is also, I believe, often the most universal. Such "moments" and the truth to which they bear witness can be passed on to others not present by our telling of them.

For me the reception into WCC membership of the China Christian Council was the supreme moment of the assembly. I thought of a marvellous lady in my congregation who died just a few years ago. A doctor, she had gone as a young woman missionary to China, stayed until well into the second world war, when she had to leave, and returned there until the communist regime made it expedient, not so much for her but for those on her staff, to leave in 1952. She never lost her love of China. As Bishop Ting and his colleague stood on the assembly platform I could sense her joy in heaven. This moment spoke profoundly of the power of the Holy Spirit to sustain and nurture the church, through suffering. It spoke forcefully of how important it is for a church, if it is to be fully Christian, to take its place alongside other churches in the one fellowship. This happening was the real and sufficient answer to the protesters outside the worship tent and convention centre on various occasions! What a privilege to participate in such a historic moment!

Just as a photographer goes for his or her picture, so a journalist looks for the story. It was a new experience for me to be fully part of the communications network and therefore to see at close hand the work of the journalists. There was an impressive number of them present, and from many parts of the world. The ecumenical movement, as the churches themselves, is more dependent on the press, secular as well as "religious", for telling its story than they may realize. The media are vital to the church and the WCC in an era of hi-tech communication.

Another undoubted highlight of the assembly was Prof. Chung's presentation: "The most exciting presentation I have ever seen in my life" was how one journalist-theologian writing for a national newspaper back home put it. I do not propose to comment on the content — that's for another discussion. As a piece of communication it was stunning. Sound, physical power, grace, gesture, lighting, garb, symbol and symbolic action so blended with and complemented the spoken word that it was a compelling and unforgettable "moment".

It should not, in my view, perplex us that reactions were so divided. Some no doubt responded primarily analytically; some more emotionally. But both abstract thought and feeling are "intellectual" in that it is through our minds that we respond to what is heard and seen. If we are to "communicate" the Canberra experience we need, I believe, to communicate to the feelings as well as the thinking part of our hearers.



In this endeavour I believe the visual arts have a part to play, as does sound. The assembly video will convey much more of the atmosphere than an article or a straight talk. Hopefully the slide-tape sequence, which has the advantage of having crisp, large projected images, will also help others sense the atmosphere of Canberra and what it was like to be there. Perhaps some of us will reflect on the use of drama, dialogue, stage-set and stage-lighting as we consider how we can be WCC spokespersons.

### III

But what about the “bad” bits? The tortuous debates on business, the power-game played by some delegations (or so it seemed to some observers in the press gallery), the lack of clear direction for the WCC?

This latter problem I found somewhat worrying. The WCC’s programme has become so wide in its scope that I was left wondering at its depth and its priorities.

Being so heavily involved in photographing, editing slides, selecting them, writing a script, choosing music, getting translations done, and finally recording the slide-tape sequence, I missed quite a lot of what was happening in the plenaries. But am I alone in sensing a lack of real discussion about evangelism in our increasingly and aggressively secular world (in the West) and multifaith world elsewhere? I totally support the contemporary understanding of “mission”, and a holistic approach. But the church’s mandate is to communicate, not just express, the gospel. Without men, women and children won to real life-shaping belief there will be no church and no ecumenical movement.

The more radical souls may wince at that statement. Is not the Holy Spirit free to choose to work through whatever structure he/she will, whether “church” or not? I believe so. But I also believe in the church. The assembly was an assembly of the *churches*. Churches, not just delegates or individuals, were therefore meeting under the prayer “Come, Holy Spirit — Renew...” Years ago I learned how difficult a word “renewal” is for the Orthodox churches. It seems to smack of novelty and a rejection of the old. This assembly showed, in my view, how much the various Orthodox traditions have to share with the rest of us out of their theological concern for the preservation of the historic truth of Christianity which, though obviously understood through cultures, is also “over against” culture as something that stands on its own, from Jesus Christ, through the apostles and “the church”. They have also much to share with us from their spirituality which comes through as both evangelical and catholic, to use terms which in Western Christianity have often been painfully polarized. But my prayer is that the Spirit may soon enable the Orthodox churches to have, as do Presbyterian, an “open” Table. I find it hard to have real communication without communion.

My reference to the “evangelical” and “catholic” emphases reminds me of a hopeful and happy aspect of Canberra: both “evangelicals” and the Roman Catholic Church, through their representatives, conveyed very positive attitudes towards the World Council and its family. Again, whatever the official statements — warm and encouraging in both cases — it was in contact and conversation that the spirit of fellowship in the One Spirit was most affirmed. The Holy Spirit — whether male or female — is the ground of all human communication; for the Spirit is the interpreter,

the One who takes the message of Christ or of the church and makes it understood and convincing.

Come, then, Holy Spirit, and renew our communication, that those not present at Canberra may truly "hear"; and those of us privileged to be present may continue to be part of the unfolding experience of an ecumenical movement and instrument at a point of crisis.



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# “Worship and Work Must Be One”

But Were They?

*Elsa Tesfay-Musa*

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As I reflect on my three weeks in Canberra, Australia, attending the World Council of Churches’ assembly and the women’s pre-assembly meeting, so many images flash through my mind that I have some difficulty sorting out my feelings and impressions.

There are two things, however, I am certain of: I absolutely enjoyed the worship, both at the women’s meeting and the assembly itself; and I immensely appreciated the opportunity to meet so many people from diverse Christian traditions and cultures.

## **Worship/inclusiveness**

As wonderful as the singing was during the daily morning worships, it is not only for the singing that I remember the worship but mainly for the efforts made to show in practice that we are all one family in Christ. The central message I received from the prayers, the languages used, the selection of people leading the worship, and the images and symbols used in almost all of our worships is that of inclusiveness. It is encouraging to note the efforts made to ensure that all God’s people — children, youth, seniors, lay, ordained, women, men, indigenous peoples, people of colour, and differently abled persons — participated in the worship at the beginning of each day.

Yet, when one of the differently abled persons reading a prayer changed the words “let us walk towards” to “let us move towards”, I was reminded that although we are making efforts to rid our worship of sexist and racist language, we need to continue to be vigilant against any language that may exclude people in one way or another.

It was with this image of the church as an inclusive society that I started each day and looked forward to the daily activities of the assembly.

But sometimes it seemed that as soon as we left the worship tent, most of us left behind us all the efforts made to be inclusive, and to be sensitive to each other’s diverse backgrounds. One example of how we and the church intentionally or unintentionally close the circle and exclude those we do not agree with or, even more

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● Ms Tesfay-Musa, originally from Eritrea, East Africa, now works for the World Mission Department of the Anglican Church of Canada as Partnership Resource Officer. She attended the assembly as an observer.

so, those we think are not expressing their views on our intellectual level, came when several times in our group the meeting turned into academic theological debates among those present, who were mostly doctors or professors of theology. Sometimes the situation deteriorated to the extent that those who could not quote from the “important” theological studies and books felt too intimidated to give their “humble” views and were therefore excluded from the discussion and not heard.

I hope that this situation was not repeated in other groups. I believe that ordinary lay people who might not have formal theological education still have a lot to offer from their understanding of the faith. Frequently, people with minimum formal education who struggle daily with their faith amidst situations of poverty, oppression and prejudice, and whose survival (in some places) depends on their nurturing peaceful co-existence with their neighbours of different faiths, have deeper insights into the meaning of the Christian faith, ecumenism, justice, peace, the integrity of creation, dialogue with people of living faiths, etc., than those who live in academic isolation.

It would be a pity if at future WCC assemblies, as well as other forums, we were to lose the opportunity to be challenged by people whose understanding of their faith is enriched by and comes out of their everyday struggle for survival. Let me give just two examples of some suggestions regarding inclusiveness that were not pursued further.

There was no follow-up to a point raised by one of the delegates who suggested that churches include the economically disadvantaged in their delegations. He noted that all delegates and other participants were from a middle-class background. And again, when the issue of refugee representation was raised, the answer given by one delegate was: “There is no need to have direct participation of refugees as delegates because the churches who help them are here and they’ll speak for them on their behalf.” It is time for the churches to stop talking on behalf of refugees and other marginalized sectors of society, and put more effort into empowering them to tell their own stories.

### **Making the connection**

I found the section deliberations and the plenaries very challenging. On my way back home, my suitcase weighed at least five kilograms more than when I arrived in Canberra. It was filled with all the papers that came out of the section meetings, the papers from the plenaries and many more. These papers are very important and I find them useful in my life and work. I’ve filed them for regular reference.

But I carried back much more than the papers and books from the assembly. I carried back my learning and experiences from meeting people from so many Christian traditions and cultures.

This part of my “luggage” is most important. It is not made up of papers that can be filed away. It is most important because it is made up of feelings, impressions, hopes, visions and challenges that I carried back in my heart and therefore continue to carry with me everywhere I go. It is made up of enriching memories and events. What were these memories and what do they mean?

One that is most painful yet such an eye-opener to me is the incident where, because of some misunderstandings in the planning of the peace march, the Aboriginal people of Australia stood aside and waited for the last marchers to go by before joining the march. I was one of those people who marched past this group; so preoccupied was I with the march that I did not stop to ask why they were standing on the side. My gut



feeling was to stop and ask what the matter was, but I followed not my heart but my mind which rationalized that I did not have the time to stop because I was already too far behind the march and would be late for worship if I did not hurry on.

What this incident proved to me was how even I, a person who because of my colour, gender and, at one time, because of my status as a refugee, felt exclusion, had failed to take time to recognize the hurt people were experiencing, thereby missing an opportunity to live out the message of sensitivity and inclusiveness learned from our daily morning worship.

This painful experience teaches us all always to put people ahead of the Western obsession with “time”, “order” and “programmes”.

As important as the time spent in formal deliberations was the informal time I spent meeting and talking to people during coffee breaks, at lunch and supper times and in the evenings. There we had some of the most frank discussions about the WCC, the ecumenical movement, and how attending the assembly had strengthened some people’s views and challenged others.

“My bishop does not like women,” said one delegate to me, wondering why her bishop nominated her to represent her church. “Maybe I am to be like Esther in the Bible and use my new-found position to ensure that women’s views are heard in my church,” she said. She added that because she attended the women’s pre-assembly meeting she feels a changed person and cannot go back to being the same docile person “who sits through our meetings in my church while women’s views are being ignored”.

Looking exhausted, an Orthodox woman at the lunch table said she felt she was spending her time “defending” Orthodox women at gatherings of Protestant women and “defending” Protestant women at meetings of Orthodox women. Building bridges and making connections are not easy tasks, but sometimes more bridges are built at informal gatherings of ordinary people who don’t necessarily start out to work for ecumenism, only to listen to people with differing views.

For me, the assembly has, among other things, reinforced my strong commitment to ecumenism. The opportunity we had to worship with people of such diverse theological and cultural backgrounds, to live in community for several days, to work in sections and plenaries enriched by diverse theological perspectives, and to be challenged by so many “incidents” during our two weeks as a WCC community, should continue to remind us that we will only grow in our faith if we continue to widen our “circle” by always ensuring the circle is not closed and that there are still openings for more to join in and strengthen it.

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# The Council and the Councils of Churches

*Alan D. Falconer*

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Fascinating — exhausting — exhilarating — inspiring — bewildering — frustrating: these are a few of the adjectives which spring to mind when trying to characterize the event which was Canberra 1991.

The assembly enabled the participants (and hopefully through them their churches) to participate more meaningfully in prayers of thanksgiving and intercession. Through sharing, the participants were enabled to learn from each other about the activity of the Holy Spirit in every part of the world and thus to see, through that activity, hope emerging in situations of dehumanization. In a Brazilian context, for example, where people have disappeared, children become the objects of prostitution, and human rights and dignity are seriously undermined, the Holy Spirit has strengthened Christians of many denominations to work with the dispossessed and the broken, that new life may emerge. In Eastern Europe, testimony to the activity of the Holy Spirit in transforming society through the activity of Christians was given. Through joint Bible studies in Pakistan, the Holy Spirit has enabled the women of the churches to play a prominent role in drawing the churches towards greater cooperation and into unity. From New Zealand the remarkable attempt to create a bicultural society between Pakeha and Maori... and so one could go on, noting account after account of the activity of the Holy Spirit in every part of the world. Intercession is made real through the forum of the World Council of Churches, and this is an important contribution. The Council helps us see our lives as Christians in different parts of the world, and our efforts to be faithful in our own contexts, as being interdependent.

As Christians and churches seek to be faithful to the gospel in their diverse specific situations, they wrestle with how to articulate the gospel and understand it in light of today's challenges. The assembly provided a forum for participants to learn from each other; but time did not allow an adequate dialogue between different views, or provide for a proper learning process. The WCC is clearly the forum where the issues at the cutting edge of theology and witness are faced. No other forum contains such a diversity of experience and reflection. But an assembly is itself not capable of detailed

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● Dr Falconer, who attended the assembly as an adviser, is director of the Irish School of Ecumenics, Dublin.



examination of such important issues. That is the appropriate task of the various commissions. A more constructive use of plenary sessions at the assembly, however, might at least have enabled the participants to begin the process of dialogue on the crucial emerging issues — such as biculturalism, or multiculturalism; the question of global warming; the population explosion; the relation between the gospel and specific cultures, as was evident from the *non*-dialogue surrounding the Korean presentation; the issue of faith in an increasingly secular world. And creative planning might enable an assembly to provide a structure for such dialogue. At future assemblies might not the different regional councils present the questions which they face, to open up discussion and dialogue upon them? The few regional meetings held at Canberra seemed designed to construct an agenda in the hope that the WCC might adopt specific issues, instead of being an occasion where real dialogue and learning could occur. To give an example, the Pacific region's concerns with multiculturalism and the rights and needs of minority communities could have learned from the Canadian experience, as could the Asian, Middle Eastern and European regions where such work with minorities plays an important role in the agenda of the churches.

### **The need for greater cooperation with councils of churches**

As participants shared their stories, it became quite evident that the Holy Spirit has drawn the churches out of isolation towards each other and towards unity through both the World Council of Churches and through local, national and regional councils of churches. The councils have quite clearly been agents of the Holy Spirit, as was affirmed in the report of the section which focused on assembly sub-theme 4. As Lukas Vischer noted in a pre-assembly article, when the WCC came into existence there were very few councils of churches; that situation is now radically different. As the WCC looks towards the future and its own restructuring, it should explore the possibility of greater cooperation with regional and national councils of churches. It was often assumed by local church members and by the press that the British Council of Churches, for example, was the “British office” of the WCC! While that was very far from the case, and while a proper autonomy must exist for regional and national councils, a closer link with these councils would enable the WCC to grapple and dialogue more adequately with contextual theologies. Such a closer relationship might also further the New Delhi vision of a “conciliar fellowship of churches locally united” by fostering the conciliar fellowship of churches in a specific geographic area. (Such closer cooperation would also facilitate the ecclesiological vision of solidarity elaborated by Leonardo Boff in his *Ecclesio genesis*.)

It was evident at the Canberra assembly that through their being agents of the Holy Spirit, the WCC and councils of churches do have a certain ecclesiological significance. They are instruments *in via* to the one church, as Jean Tillard and others have noted. They are instruments “between the times” of division and of unity. Councils, above all the WCC itself, have also enabled the churches to take seriously the classical *notae* of the church at the Reformation. The churches have been challenged, encouraged and enabled to *confess the faith* in their local situation — to proclaim the word of God, as was evident in the Faith and Order programme “Confessing the Faith” in the 1970s. The churches have been challenged, encouraged and at times enabled to celebrate the presence of Christ in worship, through the BEM report, the study on intercession and the resulting volume of intercessions *With All God's People*. They



have been challenged, encouraged and enabled to *witness* in their situation through the WCC and councils of churches. This is an aspect of “discipline” or discipleship, which appears as a third *nota* in some Reformed confessions. It is important that the ecclesiological significance of the WCC and of councils of churches be acknowledged and celebrated, else they will be marginalized by some churches to the detriment of the whole church.

A greater integration of the WCC with national and regional councils of churches might also address another experience of the Canberra assembly. In discussion groups and informal conversations it was very evident that the participants felt that the ecumenical journey undertaken in the WCC required the greater presence of Roman Catholics. In their local and regional contexts participants have the experience of sharing with Roman Catholics. To find at Canberra such a token expression of Roman Catholic presence — even if the official Roman Catholic observers did present themselves as an impressive and informed team — was both disconcerting and frustrating. Time and time again, participants emphasized that we cannot travel further on our ecumenical pilgrimage without Roman Catholics taking a full part in that journey with us through membership in the WCC. It is not sufficient to put forward the practical difficulties that such membership would involve. But if not full membership, then a relationship of association should be possible, perhaps on the model of the Conference of European Churches and Conference of European Catholic Episcopal Conferences’ cooperation for the JPIC meeting at Basel, 1989, or on the model of the Caribbean Conference of Churches.

Such a greater involvement by the Roman Catholic Church might affect the participation of some evangelical churches in the World Council of Churches, as happened in the United Kingdom with the establishment of the Conference of Churches for Britain and Ireland (CCBI) last year. However dialogue could avoid this, especially as these evangelical churches have found it possible to remain in a council and work alongside Orthodox churches whose ecclesiology has, at times, been presented in an exclusive manner. The Council also needs to embark on more explicit dialogue with Evangelical and Pentecostal churches. All these perspectives, of course, present an immense agenda.

### **“Ecumenical memory” and “ecumenical formation”**

A further theme which in light of Canberra needs far greater emphasis is that of “ecumenical memory”. In the groups and plenaries it was evident that too few participants had appropriated the ecumenical story or were conscious that they themselves were carrying it on. When participants affirmed a lack of agreement on scripture and Tradition, and thus on the ability to do theology together, it was as if the Faith and Order conference at Montreal (1963) had not happened. Similarly, the ethical tradition of the Oxford conference (1937) and beyond, which demonstrated ways of approaching ethical questions, needs again to become part of ecumenical ethical discussion. The task of the WCC in the 1990s includes helping the churches “appropriate” the ecumenical pilgrimage thus far, showing in the process why certain directions have seemed more appropriate than others.

Such an attempt to recover the “ecumenical memory” must involve a sustained and deliberate programme of “ecumenical formation”. The WCC programmes on ecumenical learning and ecumenical teaching of the last decade have produced tools which can



aid this process. Should not these be taken up by theological colleges and ecumenical institutes? While “ecumenical formation” has been a topic of consideration in the Joint Working Group between the WCC and the Roman Catholic Church, the sixth report of the Group has not signalled any advance on the fifth report. Consideration of “ecumenical formation” needs to enjoy a higher priority with the churches, the Joint Working Group and the WCC so that the ecumenical pilgrimage can be charted, and its achievements and difficulties better appreciated.

### Unity

My final reflection on Canberra is that the unity of the church for the sake of the unity of humankind needs to become central to the agenda of the churches. The concerns raised at Canberra, whether in plenary session, in sub-groups or in informal discussions, often gave the impression of a cluster of different interest groups all clamouring for attention, without any effort to relate each concern to the WCC’s central mandate to seek the unity of the church. Canberra 1991 will be remembered for the statement “Unity of the Church as Koinonia: Gift and Calling” — a statement which was a development from a draft statement produced by the Faith and Order Commission. The whole assembly, however, did not wrestle enough with it, and did not keep it as a central focus of its concern. One has some confidence that church unity will again become such a central concern in the 1990s through the Faith and Order world conference in 1993, which should focus on ecclesiology. The new moderator of the central committee, Aram Keshishian, is also likely to keep this as a central question since he wrote in the *International Review of Mission* prior to the assembly that “the question of unity and mission is a question of survival”, and in *The Ecumenical Review* that the WCC “is a fellowship of churches based not on a common ecclesiology, but on a common commitment to work together for visible unity”. This commitment and search need again to come to the fore of the WCC’s work and vision.

Those of us privileged to attend Canberra 1991 can never be the same again. We have learned of the activity of the Holy Spirit in different places and situations. We have shared and become companions with Christians from every part of the world. We have learned from each other, and at times wrestled to understand one another better. Our ecumenical vision has been enlarged and our commitment enlivened. Our task is now to try to communicate that vision and commitment in our own settings so that the ecumenical event of Canberra can nourish and challenge our churches. For the new central committee, one hopes that they will further our pilgrimage through a greater involvement with regional and national councils of churches, a greater involvement with the Roman Catholic Church and evangelicals, a greater emphasis on the search for the unity of the church, and the recovery of the ecumenical memory and the promotion of ecumenical formation. If these issues are pursued, then the assembly of 1998 will be able to mark a significant new stage of our ecumenical pilgrimage.

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# The Joy and the Pain

*Rubye Gayle*

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Thursday, 31 January 1991, was a significant day for me, for it was the day I left on the long flight to Canberra to attend the WCC's seventh assembly. From Los Angeles, I sat by a wonderful couple who have had a full life together for fifty years. They were on the way to Sydney to celebrate their fiftieth wedding anniversary. They were happy and felt very fulfilled, they said, as they reminisced on their years together, and what the church had meant to them over those years, and shared with me their strong belief that with all its weaknesses the church was the only hope they saw for the world. It was their prayer that the church would be more active in its quest for closer unity.

I reached Sydney, where I was to take the bus to Canberra, said goodbye to the couple, and then met with some of the young people who were going to the assembly as stewards and delegates.

They were enthusiastic and alive as they talked of their expectations of the assembly. They were meeting for the first time, and yet as we journeyed on the four-hour bus trip to Canberra, there developed soon a oneness among them. They were in the same mission, committed to the same cause. It was encouraging to listen to them, and their enthusiasm was infectious.

We reached Canberra; then it was settling-in time, finding your room and a bed to sleep away the jet lag and recover the loss of a day as we crossed the international date line. Early next day I was ready for the women's pre-assembly meetings. That was a good start; a sort of thawing out for many women — a chance to clarify, gather awareness, and information and understanding; to feel a sense of belonging and solidarity, and to gain a measure of confidence to find a place in the bigger group to come.

## **The theme**

By the time the assembly started with almost 4,000 men, women and young people from all over the world, one began to feel not so strange, but part of a big family! The theme, "Come, Holy Spirit — Renew the Whole Creation" had gripped me. At a time like this — in the midst of the terrible Gulf war and all its implications, of continuing racial divisions in South Africa and elsewhere, of the worsening economic situation and the debt crisis in my own country and most of the third world, of the incredible changes in Eastern Europe — the whole world stood in need of that prayer.

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● Mrs Gayle, Jamaica Baptist Union, is general secretary of the Jamaica Council of Churches. She was at the assembly as a delegated representative.



The world had gone through shattering experiences since the last assembly — such as the breaking down of the Berlin Wall, the dismantling of communism in Eastern Europe and the issue of perestroika, the freeing of Nelson Mandela after over 27 years in prison... The welcome dialogue over apartheid, the violence against and the cheapening of human life — truly, it is a time of crisis beyond our understanding, beyond the WCC. We stood in need of repentance, confession, forgiveness, reconciliation and renewal. For the WCC to come together with such a prayer at such a time was significant, and many of us looked forward to great things.

People are fed up with the materialism, the injustices, the imbalances that are evident everywhere, and are seeking clarification, solidarity and guidance. Community is once again seen as vital. It seemed divine guidance had led to the choice of such a theme.

### **Impressions and experiences**

So we came with much expectation. Whether there was enough openness to and dependence on the power of the Holy Spirit is to be seen in how we respond to this assembly, especially when we return home to our churches and communities. In my sub-section, the reaction of some was one of disappointment in that there was not more visible opportunity provided to wait upon the Holy Spirit, through prayers and confessions and testimonies. Apart from the worship service of half an hour each morning, which some participants did not attend because it was so early, there was no waiting on the Holy Spirit at the other sessions; there were too many theological arguments and not adequate sharing of practical experiences by ordinary folk to which participants could relate. Some of the more charismatic complained that they did not feel the freedom which the Holy Spirit gives to ordinary people who are not burdened by heavy theological questions but with practical issues.

By and large, though, the sub-sections seemed to address the general and particular needs of the many participants and their concerns. We were given freedom to choose the section we wanted. The smaller sub-sections provided for greater intimacy; the groups were more manageable and participatory. This proved very helpful. Participants could have a say in such a setting. People respond with much more openness when they feel “a part of”; and they are much more open to unity when they understand the issues, and become more aware of what is being discussed, and feel a closer fellowship. In this setting one feels free to make constructive criticisms, get clarification or corrections and become more sympathetic and caring, ready to listen, and sometimes to change one’s position for the common good.

I found the assembly an enormous witness to unity, and it was a great privilege for me to be part of such a wonderful experience which I will never forget. My meeting with such a vast variety and diversity of people from so many confessions and races, my discussions and conversations with individuals and groups, our chats over meals and talks and exchanges about our cultures, my being invited to share in worship, and in the session on the historical road from Vancouver to Canberra, and in a panel discussion, my experience in Sydney in a parish worship, and of sharing in the life of an Australian family — all these meant much to me, and I want to translate them into the life of my church and in the wider Jamaica Council of Churches and community.

The invitation extended to people of other faiths not only to attend but also to participate in the sections and sub-sections, in the panel discussions, also meant a great

deal to me. I was greatly impressed by the positive way they were received and welcomed. The fact that they came and stayed and entered into dialogue and shared and showed no discomfort says for me that there is a maturity and growth towards unity.

The evangelicals not only submitted a paper to the WCC Programme Policy Committee but are also preparing a letter to be sent to churches and evangelical Christians. They asked for a greater presence on WCC commissions. This points to growing understanding and hence closer relationship. In a press conference Peter Kusmic of the Evangelical Church in Yugoslavia said: "I do not have problems with people who think differently. It does not help us to withdraw into an ecclesiastical ghetto." This attitude bodes well for the future.

### **Worship services**

It is the worship service that I saw as the most immediate and promising way towards ecumenical growth. Here we had no controversies and divisions as in the other sessions. Here was real enthusiasm, participation and large attendance. People did not quarrel and argue as in the plenaries. The wide variety of the worship services from the different groups could have caused discontent and differences, but these were not at all evident. Rather, there was much harmony, and a real appreciation of the variety of our devotional heritage.

This common understanding at worship must be a challenge not to try to divorce worship from witness outside the church, for worship and witness cannot be separated. Perhaps it is as we share in worship and grow in openness that we will find oneness, and become better able to translate it in mission.

The use of symbols greatly enhanced the worship. I was not too accustomed to this, but I think it is something churches should pick up and use more. At the worship services the plentiful use of symbols served as a force of unity, of understanding, of identity. It broke the language barrier, and somehow people could identify and understand, and enter more fully into the spirit of the service and experience afresh our oneness in Christ. That was very appealing to me, and to many others. We felt "one in the Spirit".

The rich and varied music from the different lands showed an appreciation of the music of various cultures. We could all sing and feel together as the songs reflected and interpreted the mood and feeling and struggles of people. That held us together and brought better understanding and interpretation of the need for our oneness in the ecumenical journey. The Lord's prayer said each time in our own language was another way of realizing the meaningful participation of all, and bringing home vividly our shared dependence on God, and our calling upon the same God.

The celebration of the Lima liturgy on Sunday, 10 February, conveyed a strong message of unity as so many shared in the spirit of it and in the eucharist. It was open to all who serve and trust in the same God. Many had not gone through such an experience before, and did not even think it could happen. As we continue to do things together, to seek guidance from God, to share and to care, many of the barriers in the way we do things will break down. I felt the greatest pain at the Orthodox worship service on 16 February. When we were told that only the Orthodox could take part in the communion we faced the reality of our division and brokenness. But I felt hope in that the person who made the announcement made it clear how painful that was for



him. That seems to me a sign of searching; there is hope for the future. I could not help thinking, though, that he could have avoided the pain, his and ours, if we had no open Orthodox service.

The voting and election caused much bitterness and even division. This process does not lend itself to unity; it is divisive. There has to be continuous study to find a way that is more acceptable. The legalistic way of sticking rigidly to percentages of men, women, youth, and people with disabilities is far from healthy. It continues to categorize and label rather than to bring the togetherness and oneness we seek. That is the main criticism I have of the assembly.

All in all, however, the assembly, for me, was a unique experience. In this encounter we were all challenged to recover something of the moral authority to proclaim unity to the people of our community and of the world. The church is called to be an instrument of reconciliation for all humankind. We are the church. It is therefore incumbent on each one of us to do our part as individuals and as a body to pursue and promote it.

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# More Impressions and Reflections

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## A Letter to the Editors

Soeur Minke

I am deeply grateful I could participate in the assembly as an adviser. I had been a visitor at Vancouver, and from there I was able to bring back a strong message, with great joy, for the church had spoken and given a clear message for the coming years.

In Canberra I was able to participate more from the inside, as a participant in section IV. With the other people in my sub-group I followed the way of communion, listening, solidarity. And that helped me to cope with the last days devoted to business in the plenary sessions, which I found rather painful and superficial.

I was happy with the report of our section in its final version. (The first version in no way corresponded to the result of our sharing, and we lived through a time of great frustration as this was being corrected.) I am impressed with the work of the drafter — and indeed with all the work which was done behind the scenes.

I am experiencing Canberra now as a gift, a grace, for we were able to live the reality of both extreme diversity and real communion in this “cell” of the universal church which we formed during these days of the assembly. Extreme *diversity* even to the point of breaking, of incomprehension, of not listening to the other — but also always looking towards a *communion* in our desire to remain together, and during the powerful times of worship in the morning and at other points. The worship experience of the black church was for me a high point — with a strong sense of truth and much ardour. Others were the prayer vigil and the Lima liturgy.

There were, of course, some problems with worship. I thought it was most unfortunate that at the Orthodox liturgy it was not better explained that the blessed bread was for everyone, and how this bread was linked with the eucharistic bread. Several people said to me: “But I thought it was what was left over from the eucharist — I thought we could have these crumbs...” The peace procession gave me the impression rather of a festive walk than one of prayer; yes, there was an impact, but it could have been much greater.

As to the content of the assembly, the beginning plenary with Patriarch Parthenios’s speech and then Prof. Chung’s presentation could have been a good introduction to the

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● Soeur Minke is prioress of Grandchamp, an ecumenical religious community issuing from the churches of the Reformed tradition. The community’s mother house, which bears the name of the order, is located near Neuchâtel, Switzerland. Soeur Minke was at Canberra as an adviser.



subject matter. But the first of these was too long, and in the heat of the Australian afternoon its central strong message was lost for many. There *was* something within it which could have opened the way to the presentation which followed. *But who made the connection?* If the assembly had broken up into groups to discuss this confrontation, if the “shock” had been dealt with better, we could have gone deeper into the discussion. For it is indeed a serious issue to bring together traditional theology and new expressions and forms of theology, and to try better to situate the possibilities and limits of inculturation. In our sub-group we discussed this, but of course we also had other things to do.

The presence of the Aboriginals was very illuminating and will perhaps help to commemorate properly in 1992 the arrival of Europeans in America — at any rate, better than Australia did in 1988. I have just received a letter with a Dutch stamp: “200 years Australia”.

I am deeply grateful for all the contacts I was able to make, with people I already knew from the other end of the world, and with others who have become friends.

The assembly theme and sub-themes were in the form of prayers to the Spirit. Did we really hear what the Spirit wanted to say to this “cell” of the universal church in Canberra? Much happened — there was a very full programme; we spoke, proclaimed, recommended, denounced — but did we listen: to others, the voiceless, but also to those who are very sure of themselves and of their tradition? Could we hear the Spirit speaking through them? And what the Spirit wanted of the assembly in a time such as ours?

Fortunately, there were the noontime services.

I think another time the assembly should be organized differently — I don’t know how — so that there are more possibilities for real dialogue and “walking the way” together. And I would very much want to see prayer find a more central place. But is this possible in such a big gathering? This time the distances between the various meeting places did not help matters.

In any case I feel committed together with my community to strengthening our prayer for the Council... for the task is immense. May the Spirit give all of us wisdom and intelligence and simplicity to carry our reflection beyond the contradictions we experience, and to find words to explain to those who find it hard to understand and to let go of their usual certainties.

## A Mixed Blessing

Adam DeVille

Of course I would have preferred to return home to those who were waiting to hear of my experiences in Australia at the seventh assembly and to be able to tell them in rapturous phrases of the glorious wonder of it all. But to do so would have presented a somewhat misleading and incorrect picture, and would have betrayed my own inner reservations.

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● Mr DeVille, of the Anglican Church of Canada, was a steward at the assembly.

Instead, I feel ambivalent. For me the assembly was very much a “mixed bag” of experiences, emotions and impressions.

Firstly, on a positive note, the context in which we met, Australia, has always been one of my long-term travel goals. Being able to go to the distant and somewhat enigmatic continent of Australia was itself worthwhile, and I relished the opportunity to savour the land, the people and the culture of what some have called “the land of the Spirit”. Indeed, since my time was limited and the visit a short one, I would very much like to go back to this fascinating country.

Secondly, the “people experience” at the international gathering was incredible. The *mélange* of cultures, customs and stories was for me a very enriching experience. I have returned more knowledgeable about vast parts of this world; and I am able to relate a little more to a given place through associating with it a particular person or group. I carry with me and uphold all those whom I have met and who have touched my life.

Thirdly, the youth experience was also something of a mixed one. The time spent together in the pre-assembly youth event, while not as sound organizationally as some would have preferred, was beneficial as both stewards and youth delegates alike attended, shared and built some community in meaningful ways. I have made friends and contacts I treasure.

On an additional note *à propos* youth, I must confess how disappointed I was in the way the WCC let us down over placements on the central committee. When given such an appallingly low number of seats, one must wonder about how serious the WCC is towards achieving its own stated goal of 20 percent youth. Moreover, the youth were vexed by the manipulative process by which certain groups or persons were “played off” against one another in vying for a place on the central committee. Are we not important enough? How much does the WCC care about the formation of the next ecumenical generation when it acts like this?

Next, the directions of the assembly itself, vis-a-vis issues of justice, peace and ecology, have given me hope for the future of the planet. The churches responding so seriously and comprehensively to the fundamental issues of our time is a positive, hopeful thing. However, here again the WCC risks courting charges of hypocrisy, for we met in a situation where we used disposable utensils, cups, plates, etc; and we consumed a scandalous amount of paper. If we are to have any integrity or impact, we must put our ecological principles in the forefront of all we do.

Now, some especially “stewardly” reflections — that is, some afterthought on my role and job as a steward. Working in the assembly’s language section, while at times very dull, was beneficial and good in that I was exposed to all the working languages of the WCC, and a cross-section of people; and I found my functional knowledge of the French language to be not only helpful but even ameliorated. For the entire opportunity to serve as a steward I am grateful to the WCC.

My regret is that oftentimes I felt as though I was experiencing only half of the assembly because I ended up missing a number of the plenaries, worships and special presentations on account of my schedule. This is, of course, unavoidable, but regrettable nonetheless.

On the whole, the seventh assembly, while in many respects “mixed”, was an experience never to be forgotten; and something by which the Holy Spirit changed — indeed “transformed” — my life as a young person. For all of it I am the richer.



# A Taste of Communion?

Godofredo Boll

It is one thing to experience ecumenism at home, in one's own country, and quite another to experience it at the global level at a WCC assembly. At home ecumenism is closer to the reality of the life of the churches — in an assembly it is experienced on a worldwide scale and it appears much more complex. In Canberra ecumenism could be felt in all its richness through the many different traditions and cultural settings which were present. At first this experience can be overwhelming, frustrating and disturbing, because that unity as an inclusive communion is still very far away.

I felt that there were two highlights of this assembly. Despite certain strange, unfamiliar elements, the worship was certainly one of these. The worship services were literally the “high” and “comforting” points for many during the assembly. The other highlight was the meetings in the sections and especially in their sub-sections of about 25 persons, where we combined study, discussion and personal encounter and where exchange and communion really took place. How could this personal and interpersonal dimension have become even more significant? I think we should have had half an hour of Bible reading and prayer each day in small groups, because this contributes in a very pervasive and powerful way to the building of communion.

For me the Canberra experience raised many doubts about the process towards a “conciliar life” among the churches. In general terms the assembly looked sometimes like a large religious community, at other times like a seminary, at still others like a parliament. What was really its identity? The divisions between various possible identities became blurred, as there were hints at various points of the WCC as a super-church, as an association of churches, and as just a forum for ideas. I found myself thinking that perhaps the WCC should act more as an association or fellowship of churches — then it could do without elaborate structures and the consequences which they bring.

There seemed to be a very frail connection between the theological reflection which went on at the assembly and the consequences which were to be drawn from that reflection. It makes little sense to pass many recommendations which, in fact, are not founded on the nature and “way of being” of the churches themselves. We are, after all, not an organism of the United Nations. We need urgently to find the coherence between the prayer “Come, Holy Spirit” and the hope for renewal in many areas of life. The various commissions of the WCC will have much to do in dealing with the final documents from the assembly, and in stimulating the churches to give their “feedback” over the next few years.

Let me raise a caution from the experience of my own region of Latin America. There we have had the disappointing experience that the inclusive communion which we all seek is finished — shattered, lost — wherever the struggle for positions of

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● Rev. Godofredo G. Boll, of the National Council of Churches in Brazil, was a delegated representative at the assembly. He belongs to the Evangelical Church of Lutheran Confession in Brazil.

power imposes itself. In the name of an erroneous “Latin American” ideology, those who do not fit into the prevailing climate are simply set aside. Does this happen at the world level also?

But despite all these reservations, I affirm that being at and participating in an assembly is an extraordinary experience. Both the facilities and the organization of the meetings were excellent. At such a gathering we can experience and learn much which stimulates us to encourage and work for deeper communion among Christians, churches and all persons where we live. And we learn that we must rethink many of our notions and stereotypes about unity, in order to find a better definition of the term and a clearer vision of our ecumenical goals.

## Experience and Promise

### Khushnud Azariah

Women throughout the world are struggling for their selfhood. They claim their rights, equality and freedom to be truly human, created in the image of God. They seek unity, communion, cooperation, solidarity and community. “Come, Holy Spirit — Renew the Whole Creation” is a prayer which embodies our belief that we, human beings, are an integral part of God’s whole creation, and our renewal is dependent on the renewal of the whole creation.

I wish to focus my reflection on the interdependence of the human community (which is an integral part of the whole of creation) that has been suffering over the centuries and is now groaning for renewal and redemption.

Human beings were created in God’s own image; male and female God created them. They were created to live in mutual dependence, and caring for each other and for the whole of creation, under the power and guidance of the Creator God. In drifting away from God’s presence through greed and self-centredness, human beings also drifted from God’s purpose and thus brought destruction, pain and suffering to their total relationship.

Jesus’ own ministry was one of bringing release to the captives and helping people, especially the marginalized, to stand on their own feet and claim what is theirs. In his brief period of ministry he saw that among the most despised and exploited people were the women. Therefore they had a very special place in his life and ministry. He took the initiative to reconcile broken humanity, as this was a pre-condition for the renewal of the whole of creation. He expressed his concern not only in words but in radical action. He straightened the “bent-over” woman, who is a prototype of all oppressed people.

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● Mrs Azariah, from the Diocese of Raiwind, Pakistan, was a Church of Pakistan delegate at the assembly, and co-moderator of the Assembly Report Committee.



In my own growth as a woman, the WCC assembly has played a significant role. In my country, Pakistan, a woman is “bent over”, oppressed culturally, economically, politically and religiously. One of our sayings is: “To bring up a daughter is like watering the neighbour’s plants.” Girls are fed and brought up on the left-overs of the male members of the family. This is true even in the church. Religion has played a role in dehumanizing women and has been used to maintain the status quo of male domination. In Islamic Sharia (the law which is currently being passed through the Pakistan legislature) the witness of a woman is worth half that of a Muslim man. If someone commits a sin or a crime against her, she is not listened to because, according to the “law of evidence”, her witness is unacceptable. There is a saying that “it is a game of one’s left hand to divorce a woman” — that is to say, it involves no complicated legal procedure.

Coming as I do from such a background I found myself empowered by the fellowship of the 300 or so women who had gathered together for the pre-assembly women’s forum. This coming together of women in unity reminded me of the women at the tomb of Jesus. He had broken all barriers and restrictions that hampered their growth and advancement. When they reached the tomb they found the stone had been rolled away. From their risen Friend they received power to proclaim the resurrection. It is in taking initiatives and coming together that unexpected help and power, the gifts of the Holy Spirit, become available to us to heal our brokenness. It is in coming together, struggling together, that we behold the risen Lord. It is in listening to Jesus’s command that our blurred vision is cleared and we become the bearers of mission.

The women in the ecumenical movement have come a long way; they have made important contributions in a variety of ways. Their contributions at the assembly were significant, even as their role in the life, though not in the structures, of the church as the assembly of God has always been. Their deliberations at the assembly were born out of their painful and sometimes humiliating experiences. Their theological reflections were based on the struggles and sufferings of their daily life. They boldly talked about the wounds, the pains, the hurts they have suffered. They spoke from the heart, in contrast to others who spoke only from the head.

The women received much applause. But there were moments of humiliation and pain. I want to mention some of the painful experiences I witnessed and many other women experienced during the assembly.

Firstly, I was thrilled to see the participation of women in the worship services, especially in the eucharist (Lima liturgy). A woman leading the procession held up the Byzantine cross. I was meditating on this beautiful scene when I heard a male voice: “Look, a woman is carrying a cross, a *Byzantine* cross. This is very bad... *too much*.” In the course of the service a woman pastor was preaching. Another man whispered: “Listen, she is using ‘she’ when talking about the Holy Spirit. *What are these women up to?*” Many women in that service served the eucharist. Some men refused to take communion simply because women were serving. These men had forgotten that it was a woman who had played the role of a priest to Jesus and anointed him; in doing so she prepared his body to be broken and given to the whole human race.

I was reminded of the faithful male disciples of Jesus, who were always seen in the forefront in Jesus’ company. They stopped the little children from the fellowship of Jesus saying: “Don’t bother him, he’s tired.” Jesus said: “Let the little children come to me...” Today there are many such men who think that women, like those children,



bother Jesus and feel it is their role to keep the women away. I wish they would let Jesus speak rather than speaking for him.

The second example I want to give is about a young Korean woman theologian who spoke on the assembly theme, from within the context and culture of the suffering people of Korea caught in the bondage of unjust structures and hierarchical traditions. She was accused of paganizing the gospel message though she was only trying to translate the gospel into her own culture and looking at it against the background of her own experience.

Thirdly, I saw that a few women delegates were subjected to tremendous pressure by their male church leaders to withdraw their names from positions of importance. I was pleased when something of this became public.

Fourthly, I heard that there were instances of sexual harassment. A few women shared their experiences at women's meetings.

We women envisage a painful, difficult, uphill journey where we will be misunderstood, humiliated and left on our own. But I, in solidarity with my sisters, embrace the crucified Lord and we extend our hands, along with him, to reach out to those who are struggling for a just society. In spite of this distress, pain and fear, we felt the power of the Holy Spirit among us, strengthening and empowering us to continue on our journey of faith, love and hope, trusting in God's power to roll the stones and barriers away.

As a community of women, we seek an inclusiveness within which we can freely express our solidarity with the whole inhabited world. A variety of people (women and men) coming from varied cultural, denominational, regional and confessional backgrounds, gathered at the assembly to seek a common vision and ecumenical unity — which is needed in a world that is sorely torn and divided. Community life has been wrecked by war, exploitation, selfishness, individualism and greed. Community life gives us a sense of security, companionship, a place to share our joys, sorrows, tears, laughter, visions and dreams.

I saw clearly for the first time that working and growing together is a painful experience. There were moments when we became aware of our differences and the divisions that stand in the way of true unity and true acceptance of one another as equals. We talked and prayed about our personal and corporate renewal, but still we could not be together at the Lord's table.

The domination by the first world over the third world was condemned, but we failed to acknowledge the fact that within each region, whether first or third world, there is discrimination, and domination by privileged groups.

Most importantly, I feel that at times we tended to express our loyalties so much to our own group (sex, region, culture, confession or experience) that we did violence to the integrity of our calling and mission and to true ecumenism.

An individual who is struggling for his or her very existence is not at all concerned about Protestantism, Catholicism or Orthodoxy. Nor is he or she hung up about regional, sexual and cultural balances. Becoming obsessed with those issues means we forget the plight of the suffering and struggling people; we forget the very essence of the mission to which we are called.

Let us not distort the image of God in the name of these categories and balances. Rather, let us give opportunity to the people who are concerned with, committed to and involved in the issues of peace and justice, locally and globally, to come together as God's co-workers for the renewal of the whole of creation.



# Thoughts on Ecumenism

Cristina G. Bösenberg

From my experience in Canberra and my own local situation, I should like to share one or two points which may be helpful as we think about the future of the ecumenical movement. For many of us in the third world, the solidarity shown to us by the WCC and our brothers and sisters in first-world churches has been a vital support in our struggle to defend life.

One of the themes which springs to mind is the relation between identity and unity. There is perhaps a feeling that to speak of “unity” in the ecumenical movement implies forfeiting our cultural identity, tradition and beliefs in favour of a homogeneity which levels out all our differences and rich diversity. This is not what unity means in ecumenism — quite the opposite. We can speak of unity only when we can enjoy our diversity and the enrichment of sharing different experiences and visions. Thus unity does not mean losing our identity in community but discovering it in diversity, and being enriched by learning to be “one” and “another”, different persons or churches standing over against each other in mutual care and respect. This takes time. It is a process which has started, and which we have to continue until we have learned to live in communion.

We often have a tendency to assume the existence of a single truth — *the* truth — which by claiming to be the one and only Truth excludes others and prevents an equal dialogue. This alleged “Truth” destroys the dynamic experience of sharing with one another and imposes a hierarchy which places one above the other. This hierarchy often makes itself felt between men and women, adults and young people, dogmas and dogmas, races and cultures.

I believe that in the future, as well as here and now, we have to encourage in the ecumenical movement the idea of “Truth” as a whole body of truths which belong together in unity, on an equal footing. We have to banish a sterile ecumenism which has us fighting to impose our *own* truth and revelations upon others. God is not confined to one language, one experience, one understanding, far less to one group which claims to administer God’s revelations exclusively on God’s behalf. God is present wherever people seek and celebrate life. To limit God to one understanding and one form of living is to diminish God.

Following this line of thought after the Canberra experience, I should like to focus on another theme, namely the need to shift the core of ecumenism away from traditional dogmatics to human needs and suffering. This is not new; we have already seen it happening in many third-world countries in situations of violence, war, violation of human rights, hunger and disease, where the churches have united because

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● Cristina Bösenberg, a student of theology and psychology, is on the ecumenical commission of her church, the Evangelical Church of the River Plate, Argentina, and works on the women’s programme of the Centre of Christian Studies, preparing Bible study workshops from women’s perspectives. She was a delegate at the assembly.

that is the only way they can measure up to such situations. Human suffering and need can overcome divisions that are patently dogmatic and theological. Not only is this not new for us, but the Gospels themselves show how Jesus struggled to establish a “new law” based on a response to human suffering and need.

A semiotic analysis of the different Gospel texts shows clearly the contradictions which arise between a law which had no place for human need and a law which promised and protected life and surmounted divisions of race, sex, class and age.

One example of this is Jesus’ meeting with the Syrophenician woman who in talking so insistently with Jesus recovers her human status. Jesus calls her “woman”, over-riding concepts of “the stranger” as non-human, inferior, worthless and not deserving respect. But Jesus, in his conversation with this woman, rethinks, develops and expands his ministry — a ministry which is open to one and all.

This example could certainly be developed in the ecumenical movement without fear of losing our identity, our distinctive gifts and contributions, as we seek to develop a ministry rich in solidarity and commitment to a way of life which really allows space for all to be human. It would be tragic if on this ecumenical journey we were to become so embroiled in dogmatic discussions and disputes that ultimately we would be prevented from saying and doing anything together.



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# Lessons from the Assembly

*Thomas Hoyt, Jr*

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The assembly of the World Council of Churches meeting in Canberra, Australia, was a model of worship, study, fellowship and debate, even though the latter was chaotic at times. Worship in the tent continued the Vancouver assembly, as the participants epitomized the pilgrim people of God. The variety of songs from a multiplicity of cultures enriched the ecumenical spirit of those willing to open themselves to a fresh hearing of the gospel.

Singing, studying, praying, preaching, debating, drafting and redrafting, lecturing and responding, eating and conversing, interviewing and being interviewed, eventuated into papers and anticipated outcomes for the next seven years. We invoked the Holy Spirit to come and renew the whole creation, with the realization that "the Holy Spirit guides us but we will have to do the hard work". What will be that task for the future as discussed by the assembly? I envision the following lead being given by the Holy Spirit.

We need to first give a word to the new central committee. In a sense, the financial situation of an organization determines the scope and impact of its programmes. While form follows function in organizations, flexibility in matters of staffing and programmes can be said to follow financial well-being. Because the Council is suffering a financial downturn because of world markets and currency devaluation, among other factors, the World Council may indeed witness change of form, diminishing of functions, cutting of staff and curtailing of programmes. The WCC and its new central committee, therefore, need to reassess its reason for being, even before it gets a management team to assist in the management of resources. This is critical so that the quest for unity in the church is not made subservient to the efficiency syndrome of managers who do what is best for business but not all the time what is best for the church. Let us have a theological foundation undergirding our administration of programmes and finance.

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● Dr Thomas Hoyt, Jr, Christian Methodist Episcopal Church, is professor of New Testament, Hartford Seminary, Connecticut, USA. He was at the assembly as an accredited visitor.

### **Theology and theologies**

The future of the WCC is intimately related to how we define theology. Some among us are wedded to classical theological models while others stress a more contextual approach to theology. Some see the Bible as an ancient text which is confined to the interpretation of a few for the lives of the community. Others see it as a living text open to the community by the power of the Spirit. There are many consequences of these approaches.

For the last seven years a few of us have worked on what some would call a basis for narrative theology through confession of the apostolic faith of the Nicene Creed. Others have worked through Faith and Order under the banner of the unity of the church and the renewal of human communities. The latter study led to narrative expressions of faith in God which implied a variety of theologies rather than one theology.

In the future we can expect issues of race, sex, human rights, differently-abled persons, ecology, economics, justice and peace to be among the concerns of theology. What some would call ideology or syncretism can properly be others' way of doing theology. Those not prepared to hear and appreciate theological perspectives from a variety of approaches will continue to feel excluded and become critical of others. From their point of view, heresies will abound, but from various other perspectives God's truth will abound. In the WCC ecumenical theology will continue to be construed as unity in diversity.

### **Get theology straight and we'll eat with you**

One of the painful experiences at the assembly, and one likely to be with us in the future, is the inability to participate in eucharistic fellowship even when we agree on eucharistic theology. Even though Orthodox say they understand their theology experientially through the liturgy, there is no justification, theologically speaking, for exclusion from the table of the Lord for those confessing the name of Jesus Christ. This is especially true if we are to agree with the sermon at the Orthodox service in which we heard His Holiness Pope Shenouda say that our task as Christians is to build the kingdom of God. Of course, I contend that we are not so much called to build the kingdom as to participate in it. Be that as it may, the kingdom of God has been ushered in by Jesus Christ who did not ask us to get right before he ate with us. He loved us, ate with us, *before* we got it *right*, with the hope that persons would experience God's love, believe, repent, be baptized and receive the Holy Spirit. Practice of the faith and acceptance of others prior to theologizing as ground for acceptance is more endemic to the gospel of Jesus Christ. Eucharistic hospitality may be more important for the future than agreement on a comprehensive or coherent theology.

### **Creation and history**

In the assembly there seemed to have been a concerted call for development of a theology of creation. In the West, we have concerned ourselves with "anthropocentrism" rather than "life centrism". Prof. Chung Hyun Kyung so remarkably reminded us of this state of affairs in her address on the assembly theme. As such, we have stressed *his*-story and are only beginning to emphasize *her*-story. This is still a relevant and necessary task recognizing the importance of human beings. For example, people



who are “differently abled” told the assembly that they wanted to be fully participating persons not because they were begging but because they were created in the *image of God*, and had been included and accepted. This is the basis of a creation theology.

In the future, we will see texts of experience and ancient texts in conjunction with creation motifs. In our conversation regarding economy, ecology and creation, my hope is that the WCC will not hesitate to translate such talk into justice, peace and the integrity of creation. In connection with creation, we will be enhanced by a discussion of the blessings and bane of technology. We may be moved once again to hear the prophetic words of Martin Luther King, Jr, who warned us against militarism, poverty, racism and materialism. With emphasis on creation, we may be able to appreciate nature which is desecrated by technological concerns that elevate profits over people.

### **The old and the new**

Thank God for Orthodox Christians and others in China and Eastern bloc countries who have maintained their expression of the faith in very difficult times. The whole church is in their debt as the assembly recognized in wholeheartedly accepting the Chinese church into the Council after a 40-year hiatus. Yet the assembly was challenged, and will be challenged in the future, to be open to charismatic and pentecostal movements and African Independent churches.

While some in the ecumenical movement will continue to feel that the primary aim of the church regarding those outside the Christian faith is to proclaim and evangelize, there is growing concern that the church should open itself to encounters with people of other faiths through dialogue and sharing.

### **Spirituality and faithfulness**

There was in this assembly a stress on spirituality which portends well for the future. Those in affluence, poverty and struggles for justice were challenged to embody a spirituality which would transform individuals and society. In Australia, land of the Aborigines, the challenge was made with intensity. The Aborigines are indeed people of the land who experienced the Spirit of God 38,000 years before Christianity.

The Aborigines confess that God has never left Godself without a witness. They can teach us what it means to experience spirituality from a holistic perspective: body, soul, mind and heart. We need to hear the cry of indigenous and Aboriginal people to be included not only in talk about spirituality but also in dealing with their understanding of theology.

### **Process and result**

For the future, especially for world assemblies, we need to be mindful of what I’ll call Hoyt’s Law. In the short run, process work with diverse groups is more important than results and perception is more important than reality. In the long run, results are more important than process, and reality is more important than perception.

At the Canberra assembly, process, perception, results and reality have all become apparent, signifying various levels of work in ecumenical endeavours. Participants left Canberra with various impressions, based on where they fell on the spectrum of Hoyt’s Law.

For future assemblies, we may need to avoid the impression that we are so busy praying that we do not have time to pray. We are so busy planning statements that we do not have time to make them. We are so busy setting our own personal and group agendas that we have difficulty digesting the statements of others. We are so busy castigating war-mongers that we do not really hear from the Prince of Peace. We are so busy remembering and celebrating past accomplishments like BEM, the Lima liturgy, the history of the unity movement from Amsterdam to Canberra, the apostolic faith and unity of the church and renewal of human communities, that we barely have time to establish an agenda for the next seven years. We are so busy taking the Australian government to task for its systematic racist practices against Aboriginal people and other governments who have practised oppression through sexism, nationalism, racism, and imperialism, that we became oblivious to the racism expressed in the context of the WCC itself. We are so busy assessing how we have failed in meeting representative and participatory quotas of men, women and youth, ordained and unordained, and are so paralyzed when it comes to successfully meeting those quotas from member churches, that we fail in the end to achieve a proper representation on the WCC central committee. We are so busy fitting into stereotypes that we slot certain persons and groups to lead worship or preach, but ignore others like African-Americans when it comes to major lectures or presentations to the assembly.

Some of the above contrasts may be termed as issues of process, perception, results or reality. However one assesses the views of others, if unity is to be achieved, we must be aware of feelings as well as realities. We must continue to work at issues and, with the guidance of the Holy Spirit, unity can come to fruition.



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# Reflections on the Future

*Aram Keshishian*

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It is with special joy that I greet you in this house of love and fellowship, hope and vision. We often remind ourselves in our common ecumenical journey that the WCC is not the Geneva Centre but a fellowship that transcends all kinds of structures and programmes, and that it has no centre except Jesus Christ. Yet, after so many years of togetherness in the fellowship of the World Council, we also realize the vital importance of this centre as a place of prayer and spirituality, of reflection and action, of learning and serving. This house is not, and it should never become, an administrative centre where only paperwork is done for the churches. It is a sacred place where the churches meet together in the name of Jesus Christ to pray together, to deliberate together, to grow together, and to commit themselves to God's mission in the world. As such, this place does not exist for itself; it exists for the churches. Its place and role is in the life of the churches. It derives its meaning, its importance, its *raison d'être* from the very life and witness of the churches.

This also means that the staff working here are not employees in the ordinary sense of the word; they are missionaries. They are called to participate in a specific way in God's mission through this fellowship. The churches expect a great deal from them.....

Since this is my first meeting with you as the moderator of the central committee, I would like to share with you briefly my vision and some of my thoughts pertaining to the post-Canberra period.

1. The first and foremost concern of the Council is the *people of God*, since the church by her very nature *is* the people of God. The programmatic thrusts of the Council must emerge from the priorities of the people and be responsive to concrete issues and situations. In other terms, whatever the Council does must be oriented towards the people. Our theology must be people's theology, our programme people's programme, our money people's money, our Council people's Council. If the Council's programmes, activities and actions fail to touch the daily existential life of

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● The primate of Lebanon, Archbishop Aram Keshishian is the newly-elected moderator of the WCC central committee. This article is the text of a talk he gave to the WCC staff during a brief visit to Geneva shortly after his election.

the people at the grassroots level, the Council greatly jeopardizes its own nature and vocation as a fellowship of churches.

2. I strongly believe that the question of unity should remain the first item on the agenda of the WCC. I want particularly to emphasize this concern, as I have seen during the last couple of years an increasing shift of emphasis from unity as the major ecumenical issue to other issues and areas of concern which often are not directly related to the unity of the church. I am particularly happy that the Canberra statement on unity goes beyond the description of the nature of unity that the churches see through the ecumenical movement, and calls the churches to take concrete steps towards visible unity. The Council in general and Faith and Order in particular must constantly and through convergence- and consensus-oriented action programmes remind the churches of the centrality and urgency of visible unity for their life and mission.

3. We are living in a world of interdependence, interaction and inter-relation. The Council should continue to pay particular attention to this reality of the present-day world. It has to identify its priorities and organize its programmes so that the inter-relatedness of the issues are spelled out creatively and dynamically. I believe that the JPIC process includes not only the priorities of our churches, such as justice, human rights, racism, women, youth, ecological crisis, etc.; it also sharpens the intimate inter-relatedness of those priority issues that used to be dealt with by the churches as well as by the Council as separate issues. Therefore, JPIC ought to remain a major concern for the coming period.

4. I believe that questions and concerns related to women and youth must also be treated by the Council with equal importance and urgency. These are indeed serious issues and must be tackled as such. The Council is not a council of clergy, but a council of churches. The churches are represented in council by different categories of the people of God. We have reached a stage in our journey together towards ecumenical maturity when we must stop thinking in terms of categories, percentages, balances and imbalances, and plan and act as a fellowship that embraces the whole people of God. Women and youth are full partners in the Council. Their issues are the Council's issues. Their concerns are the Council's concerns. I come from a church, the Armenian Orthodox Church, which is a church of the people; the identification of the church and the people is such that one cannot speak in terms of church and people as being two different realities. In dealing with the issues of women and youth, in my view, the Council has to be critically selective; otherwise it loses its specific identity and becomes a platform for action groups.

5. The Council is in financial crisis. This is, indeed, a crucial problem that we have to wrestle with. I am not an expert on finance. But out of my limited experience, I want to say that the problem is not how to get money, but rather how to use it. It is imperative that first we comprehensively and critically reassess our present financial situation and policy; second, we reorganize the Council's financial system; and, third, we establish a new financial policy, a policy that encourages the churches' financial commitment to the Council on the one hand, and clearly identifies programmatic priorities on the other. I understand that the outgoing executive committee, with an aim of balancing the budget of the Council, has decided to reduce the number as well as shorten the terms of the staff. Personally I do not agree with such a drastic measure. The heart of the Council is the



programmes. And the programmes are implemented by people. In order to have good programmes we need qualified and committed staff.

6. It is my firm belief that not only the financial crisis, but many of the crises and problems that the WCC is facing can be solved when our churches strongly identify themselves with the Council. The churches, regions, and the WCC constituency must think, speak and act in terms of their *obligations* towards the Council and not in terms of their *rights* in the Council. The churches make the Council; they are the Council. The question is not only what to take from the Council, but also what to give to it. Growing together implies mutual responsibility, sharing and accountability.

7. The Canberra assembly, with its new perspectives, insights, and challenges, marks for the Council the beginning of a process of renewed commitment towards the basic goals of the ecumenical movement. It also opens the Council to new dimensions, hopes and vision. Our primary task is to translate Canberra into programmes and the programmes into life. This is not an easy task. It requires strong leadership, a leadership with vision and courage, active and full participation of the churches in all areas and at all levels of the Council's life, competent people in commissions and committees as well as qualified staff. We have to do our utmost to reach these goals.

8. I am Orthodox. I am firmly rooted in my Orthodox tradition. But I am also open to other traditions. I believe in the dialogue of traditions. Therefore, I am not here as an advocate for Orthodoxy. Of course I want to see that Orthodoxy's concerns are fully and correctly heard, but I also want to open Orthodoxy to other theological perspectives. The Orthodox churches are not on the periphery of the Council; they are as much part of the Council as any other tradition. They are called to manifest in a more concrete, critical and constructive way their commitment to this fellowship. What happened in Canberra as "Orthodox reaction" to some of the issues was only a first step by the Orthodox to respond to challenges coming from other traditions. But it is vitally important that the Orthodox churches move from mere reaction to active participation and deeper involvement in the Council's life.

At this decisive turning point in the history of the WCC and the ecumenical movement as a whole, and as we prepare ourselves for the task that lies ahead of us, let us commit ourselves with humility and a sense of profound responsibility, with courage and vision, to the mission to which God calls us.

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# Ecumenical Chronicle

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*The seventh assembly of the World Council of Churches was held in Canberra, Australia, 7-20 February 1991. From the official texts which came out of the assembly, three are published here: (1) the Message; (2) the report of the Report Committee, a special committee which met during the meeting to produce a short report; and (3) the report of the Committee on Programme Policy, giving guidelines for the Council's activities in the coming seven years. The full report of the assembly (English Michael Kinnamon ed., French Marthe Westphal ed., German Walter Müller-Römheld ed., Spanish Hugo Ortega ed.) will appear June-August 1991.*

## **COME, HOLY SPIRIT: THE ASSEMBLY MESSAGE**

The World Council of Churches is a "fellowship of churches which confess the Lord Jesus Christ as God and Saviour according to the scriptures and therefore seek to fulfill together their common calling to the glory of the one God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit". We have gathered together as the seventh assembly of the World Council of Churches. Meeting in Canberra, Australia, from 7 to 20 February 1991, we send greetings to all churches, Christians and peoples.

We were welcomed by the Aboriginal people of the land. Their understanding of land as being integral to their very life has had an impact on our thinking. We were also welcomed by the churches, the government and the people of Australia. We express our deep gratitude to all of them for their hospitality, and for the assistance they extended to us in a great variety of ways.

The theme of this assembly is the invocation "Come, Holy Spirit — Renew the Whole Creation". In worship, reflection and life together, we sought to understand the hopes and challenges of our times through the four related prayers:

Giver of Life — Sustain your Creation!

Spirit of Truth — Set us Free!

Spirit of Unity — Reconcile your People!  
Holy Spirit — Transform and Sanctify Us!

We rejoice in the diversity of cultures, races and traditions represented at the assembly, and we give thanks to God for the many expressions of the Christian faith and for the growing sense of unity amidst this diversity. We praise God for the many local developments in ecumenism.

At this assembly we have been stirred by the manifold forms of prayer, spirituality, theology and Christian commitment to which we have been exposed; we wish to share this enrichment with our churches and with people everywhere. The participation of women has been a reality at the assembly, and we commend once again the Ecumenical Decade of the Churches in Solidarity with Women. We recognize the crucial importance of the ecumenical youth movement and look forward to the global ecumenical gathering of youth and students in 1992. We are grateful for the witness made by differently-abled persons and urge the churches to provide for their full and active participation in their life and mission.

The presence of representatives of other world religions as guests at the assembly reminds us of the need to respect the image of God in all people, to accept one another as neighbours and to affirm our common responsibility with them for all of God's creation, including humanity.

We meet at a time of growing threats to creation and human life. At this time when our fragile environment is in crisis, we recognize anew that human beings are not the lords of creation but part of an integrated and interdependent whole, and we resolve once again to work for the sustainability of all creation. Amid the oppression to which many indigenous peoples, minorities and peoples of colour are subjected, we pledge support for and solidarity with marginalized people everywhere. In the face of the growing gap between rich and poor, we commit ourselves to work for justice for all.

At a time of conflicts in various parts of the world, and particularly in the Gulf, we appeal



for an immediate end to hostilities and for a just resolution of conflicts in all countries of the world.

Many divisions still prevail in our world. Some are economic and political. People, particularly many women, children, youth and the differently-abled, experience brokenness of relationships and are subjected to various kinds of injustices. The Holy Spirit draws churches into relationships of love and commitment. The Holy Spirit calls the churches to an increased commitment to the search for visible unity and more effective mission. We urge the churches to heed the call of the Spirit, to seek new and reconciled relationships between peoples, and to use the gifts of all their members.

We ourselves, the churches in council, still experience brokenness. Reconciliation between churches remains incomplete. However, in the ecumenical movement, we have been enabled to come out of isolation into a committed fellowship: we experience a growing responsibility for each other, in joy and in pain, and under the guidance of the Holy Spirit we seek ways to be more accountable to one another and to our Lord who prayed that we "may be one" (John 17:20). But we also recognize that the fullness of reconciliation is a gift of God and that we can appropriate it only insofar as the Holy Spirit transforms and sanctifies us.

God and humankind are reconciled by the costly sacrifice we see in the cross of Christ. Our appropriation of reconciliation and our acceptance of the ministry of reconciliation (2 Cor. 5:18) are also costly. Through our acceptance of the ministry of reconciliation, we become a missionary people, not in that sense of dominating over peoples and nations which has all too often characterized missionary work, but in the sense of sharing God's own mission of bringing all humanity into communion with God through Christ in the power of the Spirit, sharing our faith and our resources with all people.

We pray that the Spirit of God may lead Christians to a renewed vision of God's rule, so that we may be empowered to assume the stewardship of "the mystery of the gospel" (Eph. 6:19). We pray that we may be enabled to bear the "fruit of the Spirit" and thus witness to God's rule of love and truth, righteousness and justice and freedom, reconciliation and peace.

We are convinced that repentance, to be forgiven by God and to forgive one another,

are essential elements in such a renewed vision of God's rule on earth as in heaven. Responding to the rapid and radical changes taking place in many parts of the world we commit ourselves to sustained action that will express the new perspectives, which we have gained in our ecumenical journey and during our time together, on issues such as world debt, militarism, the ecosystem and racism.

We believe that the Holy Spirit brings hope even amidst all that seems to militate against hope, and gives strength to resolve the conflicts which divide human communities. Repentance must begin with ourselves, for even in this assembly we have become aware of our own failures in understanding, sensitivity and love. As we commit ourselves to continuing repentance, so we call all people to share in that commitment and to pray for the renewing power of the Holy Spirit to renew in us the image of God, in our whole being, personal and communal.

As we continue on our journey to the unity of the church and of humankind under God's rule, we pray, with people around the world:

Come, Holy Spirit,

Come, teacher of the humble, judge of the arrogant.

Come, hope of the poor, refreshment of the weary...

rescuer of the shipwrecked.

Come, most splendid adornment of all living beings,

the sole salvation of all who are mortal.

Come, Holy Spirit, have mercy on us, imbue our lowliness with your power.

Meet our weakness with the fullness of your grace.

Come, Holy Spirit — Renew the Whole Creation.

## REPORT OF THE REPORT COMMITTEE

1. "Come, Holy Spirit — Renew the Whole Creation!" With this prayer on their hearts Christians from around the world gathered 7-20 February 1991 in Canberra, Australia, for the seventh assembly of the World Council of Churches. This southern "Land of the Spirit"<sup>1</sup> — a land of stark beauty, where the air is filled with the sharp cries of birds and the

<sup>1</sup> From the title of a book written in preparation for the assembly on the Australian religious experience.



pungent smell of eucalyptus leaves — formed the background to this new stage of the churches' search for visible unity, for words of prophecy and wisdom, and for common witness and service to the world.

2. We met at a pivotal point in history, a time of disappointed visions of peace, of wars and rumours of wars, of threats to planet earth and to all the creatures which it bears. We were sustained by a deep hope in the renewing energy of the Holy Spirit. We confessed the Holy Spirit as one with the Father and with Christ, undivided, indivisible, embracing the whole created order within its life-giving, reconciling and redemptive love. Yet we recognized, too, the need for discernment and the danger of speaking too easily and quickly about the presence of the Spirit, of identifying the Spirit with our own priorities and programmes. We were challenged to submit all that we are and all that we do to the Spirit's purifying judgment, waiting for the Spirit to reveal all truth.

3. This assembly as those before it was shaped by the context in which it met. Through the presence and testimony of the original inhabitants of this land we learned of their history, suffering and hope for a future marked by the full recognition of their unique identity and dignity. We learned of serious efforts towards this end by both the church and the wider society, but recognize that much remains to be done. There were moving moments of reconciliation when Aboriginal Christians invited non-Aboriginal Australians to join in working for a just society, and when at the celebration of the Lima liturgy officers of the World Council of Churches and Aboriginal Christians shared the eucharist together.

4. Our life and work were warmly supported by the Australian churches, and for many a high point of the assembly will remain the dramatic presentation "Under the Southern Cross" which presented the vitality and diversity of Australian culture and the important role which the churches play within it. There were many cherished chances to meet Australian Christians, and many participants took the opportunity to experience the worship and wider life of a local church. For all the care shown and work done on our behalf, we are profoundly grateful. We register our deep gratitude also for the presentation made to the assembly by the prime minister of Australia, and for the cooperation and support extended by the civil authorities of this land.

5. We were nurtured in this assembly by a rich worship life both solemn and festive, and by Bible study which drew us together in reflection on the theme and sub-themes. In prayer and praise of the Triune God, in confession together of the faith, and in common reflection upon the scriptures, we experienced the unity which is already ours in the Spirit. We met with gratitude and joy many Christians from diverse confessions and cultures, forging and renewing bonds of friendship and affection.

6. The sixth assembly in Vancouver in 1983 had envisioned the churches growing more and more into Jesus Christ; at Canberra they were called to grow in their relations one with another, to grow into a deeper communion in faith and life. This requires bringing cherished traditions and convictions to the discussion, listening and learning from one another, and worshipping and working together. It may require that we offer — or admit that we need to receive — a costly forgiveness.

7. The concern for a speedy end to the conflict in the Persian Gulf, and a just resolution of the situation there, was constantly on our minds. There were differences of opinion as to how this should be achieved, but we were united in our anguish for all who suffer and resolute in our prayer and witness for peace.

8. The theme of gospel and culture arose with new force as we heard how concepts and images from particular cultures are being used as vehicles for Christian truth. We affirm that the church is called to communicate the gospel message intended for all humankind so that it may be heard, understood and accepted in all cultures. Such handing on of God's truth requires faithfulness to the apostolic faith of the church, creative application of the gospel to contemporary issues and situations, and self-criticism of efforts to communicate the gospel in fresh ways. We continue to search for a common understanding of how to live out these criteria in different contexts.

9. This more than any previous assembly sought to embrace the full diversity of God's people. There was serious commitment to sharing leadership among women and men, young and old, ordained and lay. Strenuous efforts were made to bring new persons into the ecumenical community. This very openness has raised fundamental questions of participation and representation both for the World Council of Churches and for its



member churches, questions which must be addressed in the years ahead.

10. There was at this assembly a fresh awareness of our divisions as wounding the body of Christ. For many the greatest pain was felt when we were unable to express fully our communion by sharing the eucharist. It was asked: how may we help overcome the divisions of the world when we cannot even celebrate together our Lord's sacrifice for its salvation? Here and elsewhere we need desperately a mobilizing portrait of visible reconciled life that will hold together an absolute commitment to the unity and the renewal of the church and an absolute commitment to the reconciliation of God's world — and that will show us the inseparable relation between them.

11. In these and other areas we are practising a costly growing together. Both hurting and healing are held within the circle of Christian community, that healing may prevail. Holding fast to one another, bearing the cost of our divisions, we seek from the Spirit of unity the gift of reconciliation and renewal.

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12. The heart of the assembly was the work done in its four sections, exploring aspects of the theme relating to creation, to truth and freedom, to unity and reconciliation, and to transformation and renewal. Several issues and questions emerged in more than one Section; these included the nature and role of the church, the activity of the Holy Spirit, the relation of the gospel to other cultures, the search for a renewed community of women and men, and the transformation of the international economic order.

### **Section I: Giver of Life — Sustain Your Creation!**

“In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth... And God saw everything that God had made, and behold, it was very good” (Gen. 1:1,31).

13. The universe in all its beauty and grandeur manifests the glory of the Triune God who is the source of all life. All things have been made in Christ, in whom God's creation comes to fulfilment. The divine presence of the Spirit in creation binds us as human beings together with all created life. We are accountable before God in and to the community of life, so that we understand ourselves as servants, stewards and trustees of the creation.

We are called to approach creation in humility, with reverence, respect and compassion, and to work for the mending and healing of creation as a foretaste and pointer to the final gathering up of all things into Christ (cf. Eph. 1:10).

14. The earth was created by God out of nothing in a pure and simple act of love, and the Spirit has never ceased to sustain it. Yet our earth is in grave peril, the very creation groaning and travailing in all its parts (Rom. 8:22). This is a “sign of the times”, calling us to return to God and to ask the Spirit to reorient our lives. Through misunderstanding — and sometimes through deliberate choice — Christians have participated in the destruction of nature, and this requires our repentance. We are called to commit ourselves anew to living as a community which respects and cares for creation.

### *The theology of creation: a challenge for our time*

15. What is our place as human beings in the natural order? The earth itself, this little watery speck in space, is about 4.5 billion years old. Life began about 3.4 billion years ago. We ourselves came on the scene some 80,000 years ago, just yesterday in the twinkling of the Creator's eye. It is shocking and frightening for us that the human species has been able to threaten the very foundations of life on our planet in only about 200 years since modern industrialization began. So where do we belong in the Creator's purpose?

16. The Christian scriptures testify that God is the Creator of all, and that all that was created “was very good” (Gen. 1:31; cf. 1 Tim. 4:4). God's Spirit continually sustains and renews the earth (Ps. 104:30). Humanity is both part of the created world and charged to be God's steward of the created world (Gen. 1:26-27, 2:7). We are charged to “keep” the earth and to “serve” it (Gen. 2:15), in an attitude of that blessed meekness which will inherit the earth.

17. Human sin has broken the covenants which God has made and subjected the creation to distortion, disruption and disintegration — to “futility” (Rom. 8:20). In our own day we have brought the earth to the brink of destruction. But we confess that the redemptive work of Christ was the renewal not only of human life, but of the whole cosmos. Thus we confidently expect that the covenant promises for the earth's wholeness will be fulfilled, that in Christ “the creation itself will be set



free from its bondage to decay and will obtain the glorious freedom of the children of God" (Rom. 8:21).

18. The sacramental Christian perspective influences our approach to the creation; we confess that "the earth is the Lord's and all that is in it, the world, and those who live in it" (Ps. 24:1). In the whole of the Christian life we take up the created things of this world and offer them to God for sanctification and transfiguration so that they might manifest the kingdom, where God's will is done and the creation glorifies God forever.

19. We agree that some past understandings have led to domination, to forms of control which have been destructive of life, and to views of nature which regard it as subject to human "ownership" and unqualified manipulation. Many streams of the tradition have misunderstood human "dominion" (Gen. 1:28) as exploitation, and God's transcendence as absence. The more theology stressed God's absolute transcendence and distance from the material sphere, the more the earth was viewed as an "unspiritual" reality, as merely the object of human exploitation. While we repudiate these consequences of some theologies of creation, we also know that they are closely related to ways of life which have received theological sanction and support.

20. We are one in our confession of the Holy Spirit as the Source and Giver of Life, and have rejoiced in exploring together at this assembly the presence and the power of the Spirit. But much remains to be explored. How do we understand the relationship between the presence of the Spirit and "sustainability", and indeed the meaning of that word and relationship for our common life? These are life and death questions for humanity and for the planet as a whole.

21. Our exploration of a Spirit-centred theology of creation has led us to deeper understanding. The heritage of indigenous peoples and non-Western cultures, especially those who have retained their spirituality of the land, offers new insights for all. Worldwide, women and the land have often been seen and treated in parallel ways. The Spirit works to heal the wounds of both. Women's experience is invaluable in helping us to understand and to heal our relationships with the earth and with each other. The poor, who invariably suffer first and most from a degraded environment, also teach us things we must know for an adequate theology of cre-

ation. In a world so intimately interconnected, their struggles are the critical starting point for all. The community of scientists is also indispensable, for they carry the single most powerful set of tools for our understanding nature and nature's fragility in the face of human onslaught. And beyond this, our sense of the mystery of life and our awe and wonder at the Creator's handiwork is deepened by what we learn from science. We thank God for all these sources of insight, wisdom and understanding.

22. Opinion is divided, however, on how to relate inherited faith claims to the new cultural perspectives of emerging Christian voices, on how to relate Christian accounts of creation to creation stories from other traditions, and on how to relate faith to science in the continuing dialogue on creation.

23. Surely the Spirit blows where it wills. We hope that the WCC as a whole will join our plea to stand in its refreshing breezes, even as we carry on the necessary task of discerning together the spirits to see if they are of God. There are new perspectives and new partners in today's world. We cannot turn our back on them.

#### *Towards an ethic of economy and ecology*

24. In the institutions of the Sabbath, the Sabbatical Year and the Jubilee Year, the Bible has shown us how to reconcile economics and ecology, how to recreate people and society (Ex. 23, Lev. 25). Effective economics and stewardship of the earth's resources are combined. Law and mercy, discipline and social justice complement one another.

25. Reducing the destructive human domination over creation calls for a new, inclusive experience of community and sharing. The biblical vision is of an intimate and unbreakable relationship between development, economy and ecology. This vision is dimmed when progress is seen as the production and consumption of more and more material things, while development is equated with growth. The vision vanishes when wealth is cut off from the needs of the poor, and the world is divided between North and South, industrialized and non-industrialized nations. Exploitation of nation by nation, of people by companies, and of those who have only the work of their hands to offer by those who have access to powerful economic resources, leads inevitably to conflict. The unfair distribution of resources brings starvation to our neighbours, while destroying the integrity of our



souls. In efforts to increase the gross *national* product, the gross *natural* product is diminished.

26. Any policy or action that threatens the sustainability of creation needs to be questioned. We cannot ignore the burden of debts that can never be repaid, bio-technologies through which human beings usurp powers that belong to the Creator, or the fact that the root causes of population growth lie largely in the poverty and lack of social security still prevailing in two-thirds of our world. In facing these and other crucial issues we need the dynamic power of the Spirit which integrates faith and life, worship and action to overcome our fear of change.

27. The free market economy facilitates rapid response to needs expressed in financial terms. But markets and prices do not possess any inherent morality. The vast and shameful arms trade illustrates clearly the immorality of our world economic order; it is one of the root causes of the Gulf war. The international ecumenical movement has for years criticized the lack of economic democracy, social injustice, and the stimulation of human greed. But flagrant international inequality in the distribution of income, knowledge, power and wealth persists. Acquisitive materialism has become the dominant ideology of our day. The irresponsible exploitation of the created world continues. Changes will come only by active opposition and informed and responsible social pressure. We are now more than ever aware that the market economy is in need of reform, and to that end we suggest the following means:

28. *Local self-empowerment*: Around the world we see that small groups of people of all races and classes, filled with courage and hope, can make a difference. These small local communities try to live against the trends of an acquisitive society in which individual greed and social and ecological exploitation predominate. Those forms of local direct action often bring a new quality of life based not primarily on acquiring goods, but on living in right relation with all of creation. A similar change in values is even more necessary on the part of those who enjoy more privileged life-styles.

29. *Government control*: Today the limits of bureaucratic control are easily seen. Legislation is effective only if it is part of a full process of social change, applied within a properly functioning legal system. In many countries more could be done to promote the

effectiveness and democratic character of governmental control. Without both political and economic democracy there will be no genuine respect for creation. The effective investigation, public prosecution and punishment of ecological crimes is a matter of urgent concern.

30. *Rethinking economics*: We should not lose sight of how the world community must be accountable to the whole creation, and how it is responsible for the economic and ecological choices to which the world system of trade leads. Market prices rarely reflect real long-term scarcities. Prices should reflect the need to conserve and to regenerate what nature offers; a market economy price is based on demand and supply, which are both being calculated on a very narrow, short-term basis. Non-material needs receive no price; hence they are often not satisfied through consumption, but only increased.

31. What we need, therefore, is a new concept of value, one based not on money and exchange but rather on *sustainability* and *use*. We need likewise a new concept of development as opposed to simple growth, a development which results in a self-sustaining whole. What is "just" and "right", then, must be found in social, biological, and physical relationships involving humanity and the earth. Such a true development focuses on the level of the eco-system as a whole.

32. *A universal declaration on human obligations towards nature*: The existing Universal Declaration of Human Rights serves as a moral standard for those charged with the responsibility of exercising power. In June 1992, the second United Nations Conference on Environment and Development taking place in Brazil will present a plan for an "earth charter". It would comprise an international agreement on the obligations and responsibilities of governments to the global environment and to future generations. We think that the charter should include a section on the obligations of industrial and agricultural producers of goods and services, with special reference to global corporations, and a section on the responsibilities of consumers. There should be judicial mechanisms for the implementation of the charter from international to local levels. And an international organization, comparable to Amnesty International, should be formed to expose violations of the charter and to mobilize the public conscience. Collective action by consumers would be very helpful to this end.



33. *Education:* We need to educate ourselves, each other and our children in the new ecological values and responsibilities. Such learning should take place in the home, school, church and work place. And beyond this, we need a spirituality which will enable us to resist the forces which treat us only as acquisitive, exploiting creatures. We need to catch the biblical vision of development, ecology and social justice. Then we must go out into the world and, as a new type of missionary, challenge every economic, social and political structure which does not conform to the standards of the gospel.

*The church: for the life of all creation*

34. The church, a redeemed community which is a sign of the "new creation" in Christ, is called by God to a crucial role in the renewal of creation. Empowered by the Spirit, Christians are called to repent of their misuse and abuse of nature and to reflect critically upon the ways of understanding the Bible, and the theological systems, which have been used to justify such abuse.

35. A new appreciation of the theology of creation and a fresh awareness of Christian responsibility towards all of creation may deepen the faith, and enrich the life and work, of the church.

**Section II: Spirit of Truth — Set us Free!**

"For freedom Christ has set us free... For you were called to freedom, brothers and sisters..." (Gal. 5:1,13).

*Christian witness to the liberating Spirit of God*

36. Freedom is a gift of the Holy Spirit. By the action of the Spirit in Christ men and women are set free from sin and from captivity to the principalities and powers of this world, from the forces of evil which tempt all human beings to do injustice to others. The Holy Spirit frees us, opens us to new possibilities, and calls us to work for the freedom of others.

37. "When the Spirit of Truth comes he will guide you into all truth" (John 16:30). The Spirit of Truth in bearing witness to Jesus Christ convinces the world of sin. Sin has brought division, discord and confusion into the created universe. Truth is often not told and is often hard to tell; but we need to know the truth before we can be truly free. The Spirit of Truth re-establishes and restores the integrity of both persons and communities. By

the Spirit we are able to know the truth and this sets us free to live a life based on love, which resists unjust dominations of all kinds.

38. As individuals and as churches we have at times forgotten our Christian vocation to witness to the gospel of freedom and truth. The Holy Spirit calls us to recognize our responsibilities for the divisions in the church and in the world and to follow the path of repentance. *Metanoia* and *te' shuvah*, the biblical terms for repentance, mean a radical change of mind, a transformation. Such repentance is the way leading to reconciliation, sanctification, and salvation in Christ.

39. The Spirit of freedom and truth moves us to witness to the justice of the kingdom of God and to resist injustice in the world. We manifest the life of the Spirit by striving for the release of those who are captive to sin and by standing with the oppressed in their struggles for liberation, justice and peace. Liberated by the Spirit we are empowered to understand the world from the perspective of the poor and vulnerable and to give ourselves to mission, service and the sharing of our resources.

40. Our theological perspective convinces us that we need to affirm the vision of an inhabited world (*oikoumene*) based on values which promote life for all. As Christians we seek a world of social and economic justice. We believe that the WCC and its member churches can witness to the liberating Spirit of God by joining their efforts with those of national and international organizations which strive for justice and freedom, and against the abuse of human rights. We believe that the gospel calls Christians to be active in the promotion and defence of human rights: the rights of women and children, the rights of minorities, the rights of those oppressed by racism and economic injustice. We are especially concerned about the human rights of young people who so often suffer disproportionately the effects of war, poverty, racism, unemployment, drugs and other social problems.

*Towards a world in which justice prevails*

41. Through the six preceding assemblies the World Council of Churches has called attention to the need to renew the international economic order. The ecumenical process on Justice, Peace and the Integrity of Creation (JPIC) confirmed the view that prevailing models of economic growth and world trade do not create conditions for a just and sustain-



able world society but rather destroy the ecological systems of the world, provoke massive migrations and lead to wars. The organization of the international market in ways which would promote life and justice for all remains a major challenge. We look for a review leading to more accountable and just economic and monetary structures, within the jurisdiction of the United Nations and the International Court of Justice. The creation of a just world economic order may require the creation of new international organizations.

42. Closely linked to the present economic order and the organization of the international market is the ongoing debt crisis which, since the end of the 1970s, has meant the impoverishment of the most deeply-indebted nations of Africa, Asia, the Caribbean, Latin America, and the Pacific. The debt crisis also threatens the economic prospects of the former "socialist" nations of Eastern Europe and is introducing tensions, financial instability and economic recession in North America, Western Europe and Japan. In this very serious situation the WCC and its member churches are called to share their energies and resources with those who suffer the effects of the world economic system. The critical reformulation of this system must be one of our priorities.

43. As Christians we seek a world of social and economic justice. This includes the empowerment of the victims of injustice and respect and care for those who are vulnerable, oppressed and dispossessed. The networks of concern that churches and Christian communities can build together and with other organizations can play a positive role in this process.

44. Racism, one of the terrible sins of humankind, is incompatible with the gospel of Christ. It is not simply exercised through personal prejudice but is also embodied in the structures and institutions of society. When members of one race or group seek to dominate those of another they are not truly free but are enslaved by their own fear and desire for control. Being oppressed and being an oppressor are both spiritually disabling. We see the need for both individual repentance of the sin of racism and for changes to abolish structural and institutional racism. The liberating voice of the Spirit calls us to embrace all our sisters and brothers in love and with justice.

45. Some specific aspects of racism which concern us are: the suffering of the black

diaspora within predominantly white societies, the increased racial tensions occurring as the result of massive migration of peoples, and the disturbing currents of racism in many regional conflicts, including the present conflict in the Middle East. We need also to recognize the particular vulnerability of women and children, who often suffer double discrimination.

46. The ethnicity which is newly emerging in Europe poses another challenge to our churches as ethnic groups are often defined in religious terms as well as by language and origin. Christianity runs the risk of being a divisive rather than a unifying force within the new political situations, and here dialogue with the Roman Catholic Church is essential.

47. At this assembly in Australia we are particularly conscious of the struggles of our Aboriginal brothers and sisters for a recognition of their history, culture, spirituality and land rights. We affirm the efforts towards justice and reconciliation made by some churches and other groups. We support all those who seek justice for indigenous peoples in Australia and in other countries.

48. The Spirit of truth calls us to know and to tell the truth about our histories and to repent of racism in the past as well as in the present. Anniversaries, such as the 500th anniversary of the arrival of Columbus in the Americas in 1992, are a particular opportunity for churches to reflect soberly on their history in the light of the gospel, and to consider what actions are appropriate to achieve reconciliation and justice.

49. Communication in the light and power of the Spirit supports and sustains the building of a community of justice and equips us to challenge the powers which are opposed to the Spirit of truth. Our communication as Christians must be prophetic, serving the cause of justice, peace, and the integrity of creation. We are to communicate with one another in love, speaking the truth and listening to hear what is truly being said, rather than what we want to hear.

50. The mass media are powerful means of control, where the truth is often not told and we are unable to exercise an informed and free judgment. Control may be exercised by governments, the market, or the dominant culture. We are specially concerned about the influence on children of the media's promotion of violence, pornography and obscenity. Churches can seek ways to educate people to be discerning listeners, viewers and readers



and to develop people's participation in communication. We encourage our churches to find ways to develop communications for liberation, to promote good interpersonal communication and the telling of the stories of the people. We encourage individual Christians who work in the field of communications to exercise their Christian witness in the workplace.

51. The search for lasting peace and meaningful security presents different challenges in the various regions of the world. The Seoul covenant (from the JPIC process) with its four interlocking elements of protection of the environment, alleviation of debts, demilitarization of international relations and the rejection of racism, provides us with a helpful framework for our Christian commitment to peace with justice.

52. We affirm the roles of the United Nations and the International Court of Justice, and believe that these and other constructive international instruments for peace and security need to be developed and strengthened.

53. Churches are called to serve as examples of peace-making, not least by making peace among themselves. They must resist the use of religious factors to cause or exacerbate conflict, and we urge that they strengthen their regional solidarity in work for peace. The World Council of Churches could play a greater role in education for peace and in working for reconciliation in situations of conflict between churches and states.

54. The relationship between men and women is fundamental to the human condition although there are major cultural differences in the expression of such relationships. Sexual difference is a gift of God in creation but our human societies are often distorted by sexism (that is, discrimination based on gender). Specific aspects of sexism which concern us are the economic injustice experienced by many women and the growing phenomenon of the feminization of poverty (in other words the fact that increasingly the poor are women). In the work-place women are not only frequently underpaid and exploited but also are often forced to participate on male terms, which take little notice of their special needs and responsibilities. At work, at home and in society generally it is common for women and children to be the victims of male violence.

55. The Ecumenical Decade of the Churches in Solidarity with Women is an urgent call to the churches to give creative support to women's movements and groups which chal-

lenge oppressive structures in the global community and in the local community and church. The form which solidarity with women will take depends very much on local circumstances and on the needs and aspirations of women themselves, but we are sure that the full participation of women in our churches and societies will encourage the renewal of community.

56. As we affirm that "in Christ there is neither male nor female" (Gal. 3:28) we call on Christian communities and families to strive for equality in relationships, for mutual respect, a sharing of tasks and responsibilities and new models of caring and sharing. We acknowledge that churches differ in their approaches to the question of the ordination of women. Some see it as an issue of justice while others do not. In this situation we urge mutual respect for the other's position in the spirit of love and understanding.

57. Facing situations of tyranny and oppression, striving for justice and peace, we often tend to lose heart and hope. As Paul exhorts the Galatian Christians not to give in to the desires of human nature, so we are called to stand fast in the freedom of Christ, to be obedient to the truth, and to walk by the Spirit. All this is made possible by the power of the Holy Spirit.

### **Section III: Spirit of Unity — Reconcile Your People!**

"Through Christ God reconciled us to himself and gave us the ministry of reconciliation" (2 Cor. 5:18).

58. Christians see truth in different ways and yet at the same time are united in the power of the Holy Spirit. Our rich diversity of insights and practices is a gift of the Holy Spirit. Sadly all too often diversity is a cause of division even in the life of the church. Yet as members of the body of Christ we are already united by our common baptism; guided by the Holy Spirit, we are drawn into a *koinonia* (communion) rooted in the giving and receiving life of the Holy Trinity. What we work towards is unity of faith, life and witness. In this process it will be especially important to face up to the divisions which prevent us from sharing the eucharist together, and make it impossible for churches to recognize each other's ministries.

59. Christians are even more deeply divided from people of other faiths and ideologies, even though we share a common humanity and face common challenges and



tasks. There are also deep divisions within and between other living faiths and ideologies.

60. From the depth and pain of our divisions we cry "Spirit of unity — reconcile your people". Reconciliation happens when there is honest recognition of the actual sin committed against our neighbour and when practical restitution has been made for it. When costly repentance meets costly forgiveness the Holy Spirit can lead us into community (koinonia).

*Christian community as koinonia in the Spirit*

61. In developing perspectives on ecclesiology, in discussing the nature and mission of the church, the idea of koinonia can be most helpful. This is so particularly as we reflect upon the identity of our own church in relation to ecumenical developments such as the text *Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry (BEM)*, which has received encouraging responses from so many churches. Koinonia in the Holy Spirit is based on sharing in the life of the Trinitarian God and is expressed by sharing life within the community. It becomes possible through reconciliation with God and with one another in the power of the Holy Spirit.

62. Unity and diversity are twin elements in Christian koinonia, but that diversity must have its limits. For example, amidst all diversity the confession must be maintained of Jesus Christ as God and Saviour, the same yesterday, today and forever. And a diversity that divides and excludes, thus destroying the life of the body of Christ, is unacceptable.

63. The gospel finds its historical expression in many cultures, which are transformed, renewed and corrected by it. Though national and ethnic identities are legitimate they should not be allowed to impair the unity of the church, or to become masks which shelter un-Christian elements.

64. In reflecting on the relationship between unity and koinonia we find a new vision in the statement entitled "The Unity of the Church as Koinonia: Gift and Calling", which was prepared by the Faith and Order Commission at the invitation in 1987 of the WCC central committee and has been adopted by this assembly.

65. The statement affirms that the purpose of God according to holy scripture is to gather, by the power of the Holy Spirit, the whole of creation under the Lordship of Jesus Christ. The church is the foretaste of this

communion with God and with one another; its purpose is to manifest this communion in prayer and action and thus point to the fullness of communion with God, humanity, and the whole creation in the glory of the kingdom. It is called to be a sign of God's reign and a servant of that reconciliation with God which is promised for the whole creation. It is called to proclaim reconciliation and to provide healing, to overcome divisions based on race, gender, age, culture or colour and to bring all people into communion with God. It is a sad fact that churches have failed to draw the consequences for their own life from the degree of communion which they have already experienced, and from the agreements already achieved through the ecumenical movement.

66. The unity of the church is envisioned as a koinonia (communion) given and expressed in the common confession of the apostolic faith; a common sacramental life entered by the one baptism and celebrated together in one eucharistic fellowship; a common life in which members and ministries are mutually recognized and reconciled; and a common mission witnessing to the gospel of God's grace to all people and serving the whole of creation. The goal of the search for full communion is realized when all the churches are able to recognize in one another the one, holy, catholic and apostolic church in its fullness. This urges action, for in taking specific steps together the churches express and encourage the enrichment and renewal of Christian life.

67. A true community of women and men is God's gift and promise for humanity, which is created "in God's image" — male and female (Gen. 1:27); and the church, as sign of that which God desires for women and men, is called to embody that community in its own life. Today Christians from many traditions look together for a more complete and authentic community of women and men. We affirm that the domination of women by men does not belong to human community as intended in God's creation (Gen. 1,2) but to the consequences of sin, which distort the community of women and men as well as the relationship between human beings and nature (Gen. 3:16-19). The God who created us as women and men calls us into community. The Christ who identifies with our suffering calls us to become his body. The Spirit who empowers us to witness and serve sends us forth as God's agents, co-workers for a new heaven and a new earth.



*Towards a wider ecumenical community*

68. Particularly in this century the world has witnessed the rise and growth of movements which emphasize the Holy Spirit and the gifts of the Holy Spirit (charisms) or, as they themselves like to put it, "baptism in the Spirit" or "filling with the Spirit". They are not all of the same type but are called charismatic or pentecostal movements and, in Africa, are sometimes identified with African instituted churches.

69. In their emphases on the charisms of the Spirit described in the New Testament and their rediscovery of the ministry of healing, these movements are valid expressions of Christian faith. If seen as based on a reappropriation of the gifts received in baptism they can be integrated into the life of the churches, bringing them many gifts. They may also represent stronger faith and fellowship, increased spontaneity, openness and freedom among worshippers, all of these leading to greater participation in the life of the churches. There are, however, negative implications for the ecumenical movement if "filling with the Spirit" as a "second experience" after baptism is seen as normative for all Christians. Such teaching may be divisive, as may be an over-emphasis on the Holy Spirit as working independently of the Father and the Son.

70. There is often misunderstanding between Pentecostals and Christians of other traditions. Some Pentecostals have rejected the traditional churches in a desire to enliven their own worship; some have rejected the ecumenical movement as a "human" attempt to produce Christian unity, or because of genuine theological differences about the nature of the Christian faith and its expression in the modern world. But others have sought fellowship with Christians outside their boundaries, particularly with evangelicals. They have begun to take an interest in questions of visible church unity; traditional churches have in turn become more open to the spiritual and theological insights that Pentecostals bring. In Latin America, for example, Pentecostals (now the numerically dominant form of Protestantism in the region) take part in the Latin American Council of Churches. Similar dialogue has been taking place in other areas as well. These hopeful signs bode well for future efforts to bring the churches closer together.

*The Christian community in mission*

71. A reconciled and renewed creation is the goal of the church's mission. The vision of

God uniting all things in Christ (Eph. 1:10) is the driving force of the church's life of sharing, motivating all efforts to overcome economic inequality and social divisions.

72. Whatever our approach to mission at home or abroad, our mission needs to be "in Christ's way". Wholeness of mission demands a will to break down barriers at every level, and involves the whole people of God in sharing, serving and renewal in a spirit of love and respect. Each church acting in mission is acting on behalf of the whole body of Christ. At the same time we affirm local ecumenical endeavours in mission. Always we need to remember our original understanding of mission, which is preaching, teaching and healing. It is best done together, and should never divide, alienate or oppress. Our conviction is not hesitant or partial that Jesus Christ through the action of the Holy Spirit is God's saving presence for *all*.

73. Since the church's mission is to reconcile all with God and with one another, sharing can be recognized as part of mission in Christ's way. It includes sharing faith, sharing power, sharing material resources. Such sharing encourages reconciliation. We affirm that what we call "ours" is given by God in love, and is given to be shared. At times sharing offers up and receives emptiness and suffering as well as fullness and joy. There can and must be no barriers to sharing, whether giving or receiving. In this spirit we affirm the WCC "Guidelines for Sharing" as an important means towards common mission and service.

74. The gospel of Jesus Christ must become incarnate in every culture. When Christianity enters any culture there is a mutual encounter, involving both the critique of culture by the gospel and the possibility of the culture questioning our understanding of the gospel. Some of the ways in which the gospel has been imposed on particular cultures call for repentance and healing. In each case we need to ask: Is the church creating tension or promoting reconciliation?

*The Christian community in relation to others*

75. The Holy Spirit works in ways that surpass human understanding. The Bible testifies to God as sovereign of all nations and peoples. God's love and compassion include everyone. We witness to the truth that salvation is in Christ, but we seek also to remain open to other people's expression of truth as they have experienced it.



76. Today in many parts of the world religion is used as a divisive force, with religious language and symbols being used to exacerbate conflicts. Ignorance and intolerance make reconciliation difficult. We seek to live in respect and understanding with people of other living faiths, and to this end we need to build mutual trust and a "culture of dialogue". This begins at the local level as we relate to people of other faiths, and take common action especially in promoting justice and peace. The first step is to come to know and to trust each other, telling our stories of faith and sharing mutual concerns. Both the telling and the hearing of faith are crucial in discerning God's will. Dialogue is an authentic form of Christian witness and ministry. As Christians we affirm the Holy Spirit counselling us to hold fast to the revealed Christ, to keep faith, and to encounter the other's faith.

77. Ideologies may be constructive or destructive; but both types tend to demand absolute loyalty and to ignore the essential ingredient of accountability, thus causing conflict. In recent years this has most strongly affected churches in Marxist-influenced societies. Now we have experienced the collapse of this system; but this is no reason for triumphalism about the free market system, as we are increasingly confronted with its negative effects throughout the world. We all, as Christians, need to analyze and understand the ideologies under which we live. Some are "hidden" — not openly acknowledged and discussed — yet deeply rooted and influential in society. Among these are wealth and achievement-oriented value systems which ignore human and personal factors. The task of the community of faith is to apply prophetic, biblical values to all ideologies.

78. Ideological trends can be found in fundamentalism and nationalism. We must learn to distinguish between fundamentalism as an approach to biblical hermeneutics and fundamentalism (whether Christian or non-Christian) which is an intolerant ideological imperialism, closed to other approaches and realities. Nationalism is positive when it unites people in the struggle for cultural, religious and political self-determination, but it is negative when used to dominate some and to exclude others. It may be even more oppressive when it contains elements that equate faith with a particular nationality.

#### **Section IV: Holy Spirit — Transform and Sanctify Us!**

"Do not be conformed to this world but be transformed by the renewal of your mind..." (Rom. 12:2)

79. It has been said that spirituality is organizing one's life so as to allow the Holy Spirit room to act. It has to do with setting priorities, with the calendars and rhythms of life which affect how communities and individuals express their spirituality. Different experiences of God's presence through the Holy Spirit in word, in the church and in daily life also determine our understanding of spirituality. We have a spiritual hunger to become what we were through creation and already are in Christ. We long for the freedom which is given through the Holy Spirit.

80. Christian spirituality is rooted in baptism, whereby we are grafted into the death and resurrection of Christ, become members of his body and receive the gifts of the Holy Spirit to lead a life consecrated to the service of God and God's children. Christian spirituality celebrates God's gifts but, taking up the cross, agonises with Christ for the sake of all God's children: made in the image of God, we are growing into the likeness of Christ (Gen. 1:27, 2 Cor. 3:18; cf. Eph. 4:24). An ecumenical spirituality should be incarnational, here and now, life-giving, rooted in the scriptures and nourished by prayer; it should be communitarian and celebrating, centred around the eucharist. Its source and guide is the action of the Holy Spirit. It is lived and sought in community and for others.

81. The Holy Spirit cannot be understood apart from the life of the Holy Trinity. Proceeding from the Father, the Holy Spirit points to Jesus of Nazareth as the Christ, the Messiah, the Saviour of the world. The Spirit is the power of God, energizing the people of God, corporately and individually, to fulfill their ministry. The Holy Spirit is "holy" by virtue of the very nature of the Holy Trinity. It is distinct from other "spirits" in this world, whether benign or demonic (1 John 4:1-6). The Holy Spirit is gloriously free, unbinding God's people from the structures and strictures of this world. The challenge to God's people is to discover, accept, and live in this freedom. To live in the Holy Spirit is to yield one's life to God, to take spiritual risks; in short, to live by faith.

82. Since Pentecost a visible Christian community of repentant and redeemed believers has been constituted by the work of the



Holy Spirit, so that this community may become the fullness of the body of Christ in history, a sign and sacrament of the kingdom of God among the nations. We believe in the church, holy and becoming holy by the work of the Spirit, a place where sanctification and transfiguration really can occur. The church's holiness is experienced as reconciliation, peace and justice, which are to be realized within the life of the community. There are various forms of Christian communities (house churches, prayer groups, base Christian communities and so on) which complement parish life by focusing on particular aspects of the kingdom such as a simpler lifestyle, a concern for personal or cultural identity or political justice.

#### *Responding to the Holy Spirit*

83. We respond to the Holy Spirit in humility and penitence. The Holy Spirit enables us to empty ourselves, to receive forgiveness, peace and joy and the grace to live for the sake of others. The church, impelled and empowered by the Holy Spirit, is called to proclaim the gospel. We share in mission and evangelism, open and sensitive to the contribution of other churches. Nominally Christian nations in the North need the help of churches in the South as they seek to relate to large numbers of immigrants and refugees of different faiths and cultures. New religions and alternative forms of spirituality present a further challenge to many of our churches and to the ecumenical movement.

84. Churches need to recover the notion of sacred time, allowing God's time, the *kairos*, to enter the *chronos* of the mundane world, enabling and empowering new visions and fresh opportunities. The Genesis affirmation of God's resting on the seventh day (Gen. 2: 1-3) has built the principle of rest into the very structure of the cosmos. The observance of liturgical times, rites and rhythms supports many kinds of Christian spirituality. The sabbath principle serves as a protection against unlimited activity and unrelenting desire for profit. The sabbath year, coming once in fifty years, was intended to break the spiral by which "the rich become richer and the poor poorer" (cf. Lev. 8:8-17). It is relevant to apply this in the debt-ridden parts of the international community. If debts are not lifted and forgiven, there can be finally no balance, no justice.

85. In a world where misery and despair mark many lives, Christians, by humble

perseverance in their work and witness for justice, raise signs of hope in Jesus Christ. The example of the "great cloud of witnesses" kindles and encourages the Christian life of many. The Holy Spirit offers us the precious and vulnerable gift of hope, reinforcing the discipleship of those identifying with the cause of liberation. There is an authentic spirituality maturing in the midst of struggle, nourished by the One who gave himself up for the freedom of others.

86. Throughout history it is the Holy Spirit who has drawn the churches out of isolation and division into unity. The Holy Spirit calls us now to acknowledge the unity which exists among us, and to overcome all confessional barriers in order to be able to share our energies, gifts and ministries on a common spiritual journey towards visible unity. Charismatic renewal movements, women's groups and youth groups sometimes challenge churches to greater openness and press towards the breaking of denominational barriers.

87. As the churches — enabled to initiate dialogue with the help of national, regional and international councils of churches — move towards each other on their ecumenical pilgrimage, the Holy Spirit calls us to repent of past stances and actions and to engage in a process of forgiveness. We need to acknowledge the occasions when our churches have failed to respect the "Lund principle" (1952) that they should act together except where conscience compels them to act separately. For without repentance and forgiveness no "new creation" as reconciled communities can emerge among and between the churches. The Holy Spirit has been evident in enabling churches to forgive, to reconcile their histories and to come to communion in God in Christ. Two current examples of churches participating in this process are the Eastern and Oriental Orthodox churches, and the Reformed and Mennonite communities.

88. The Holy Spirit has been active in strengthening the relationships between the Roman Catholic Church and national and regional councils of churches. The Basel ecumenical assembly in 1989, organized by a regional council of churches and the regional conference of Roman Catholic Episcopal Conferences, might provide a useful model of cooperation.

89. We need integrity in word and action. Sanctification means a continuous commitment to the life of visible community and a



continuous search to overcome the stumbling blocks to full and visible unity.

90. The Holy Spirit, the Giver of Life, continues to breathe life into all creation. As all life emanates from God and ultimately will return to God (Ps. 104), the ethos of holiness requires an attitude towards all that exists as by nature belonging to God. We do not “own” ourselves, our bodies, our lives, the air, the soil: all is given by God.

91. Though inseparably belonging to creation, we are in the world as stewards and as priests of creation. We are endowed with the privilege of offering creation back to its Creator. The church is now challenged to define the relationship of humanity to the rest of creation. Anthropomorphism (the idea that human beings are God’s only real concern) denies the integrity of the creation. However, sacralizing nature may lead towards pantheism and a denial of the uniqueness of men and women as created in the image of God (Gen. 1:27).

92. The Holy Spirit, giver of life, is at work among all peoples and faiths and throughout the universe. With the sovereign freedom which belongs to God the wind blows wherever it wants. Recognizing this, the church rejoices in being nourished by the ministry of the Holy Spirit through the word and sacraments.

93. Spirits must be discerned. Not every spirit is of the Holy Spirit. The prime criterion for discerning the Holy Spirit is that the Holy Spirit is the Spirit of Christ; it points to the cross and resurrection and witnesses to the Lordship of Christ. The biblical list of “fruits” of the Spirit, including love, joy and peace, is another criterion to be applied (Gal. 5:22). These criteria should be remembered in our encounters with the often-profound spirituality of other religions.

*The people of God: transformed and transforming*

94. The church is the entire people (*laos*) of God, empowered by the Holy Spirit. As the laity of the church, whether women or men, young or old, live in the world they are ambassadors of the Holy Spirit, transforming society by their witness and service. They need — but do not always receive — all the support the church can give.

95. For many it is especially the family that provides an appropriate space and ethos for spiritual development. We need to explore diverse models of family spirituality and to

find appropriate structures for prayer life and spiritual formation.

96. The church is called to demonstrate God’s all-inclusive love. In practice this is often difficult. In the fellowship of a local congregation in a small community, including persons seems natural — until an “outsider” tries to join in. In other situations the human factors of language, race, sex, caste, or economic status may seem insurmountable barriers to those seeking to join the Christian community. What we mean by “inclusive” needs to be defined by those who are, or who feel, excluded. We need to become “intensive” listeners, hearing and heeding the voice of the Holy Spirit who so often speaks through the pain of the person “on the other side of the road” (Luke 10:30-37). A truly inclusive community values every human being equally, including the marginalized. The Spirit challenges us to an *active* inclusivity, urging us to reach out in faith and love to minorities and oppressed people.

97. Another manifestation of Christian spirituality is a peace-oriented life-style, exploring the power of active non-violence, for the transformation of society. In any exercise of power the church must always point towards love as the better way. The challenge for us is to translate Spirit-led peace-making and peace-living from personal to congregational and community life.

98. A eucharistic spirituality which is actually lived out by a local Christian community is, in itself, the most valuable diaconal service that can be given. It is a missionary witness of immeasurable significance. Christian spirituality expresses itself as we participate fully in the liturgical life of the people of God, gathering around word and sacrament in fellowship and prayer (Acts 2:42). Worship both stimulates and results from our inner relationship with the Spirit. It is a life-giving means of evangelism and local ecumenism.

99. The Holy Spirit frees people to committed stewardship in relation to creation, church and community. In a world which values things more than relationships, and wealth and health more than service in love, the Holy Spirit calls us personally and corporately to live for God and for the gospel. We give thanks to God for the spiritual renewal that has been evident in the life of the worldwide church. This renewal needs to be continued and strengthened by mutual sharing with those inside and outside our churches and through the ecumenical movement.



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100. "For in hope we are saved" (Rom 8:24). We who live in the Spirit live by hope. In spite of all the dangers and difficulties of the world we are moved not to despair but to joy in the promises of the Triune God. Created by God, saved by Christ, we rejoice in the power of the Holy Spirit, the Spirit of freedom and truth, the Spirit at work in history, the Spirit which continually opens the future before us.

Come, Holy Spirit, have mercy on us; renew and empower us to be your witnesses in the world!

## REPORT OF THE COMMITTEE ON PROGRAMME POLICY

### I. Mandate of the Committee on Programme Policy (CPP)

- a) to receive and evaluate the official report of the central committee, *Vancouver to Canberra*, and to propose formal action on this report;
- b) to formulate policy for future WCC programmes, taking careful note of proposals that emerge at various points in the assembly;
- c) to prepare a report which, together with the Message (prepared by the Message Committee) and the assembly report (prepared by the Report Committee), will summarize the essential findings of the assembly.

### II. "Vancouver to Canberra"

The CPP recommends that the assembly receive the report *Vancouver to Canberra 1983-1990* with appreciation for the clear, concise and comprehensive manner in which it is presented, and with gratitude to the governing bodies, the general secretary and staff of the WCC for faithfully carrying out most of the mandate of the Vancouver assembly.

The CPP makes the following comments about the report:

A. The report offers a helpful overview of the work of the WCC since the sixth assembly. The preface by the moderator, the introduction by the general secretary and "A Reader's Guide" from the editor establish a good basis for understanding the specifics of the work described in the report. The theme concerning the centrality of Jesus Christ as the Life of the World is evident throughout the work.

However, we propose that future reports give (a) fuller assessment of the impact of programmes on member churches; (b) better evaluation of the work of the units indicating emerging trends; (c) fuller assessment of how the policies have been implemented in the programmes; (d) an overview of the relationships between the WCC and its member churches.

B. The Vancouver mandate relative to fuller participation of women and youth has been addressed in the work of the WCC since Vancouver. The Ecumenical Decade of the Churches in Solidarity with Women and the Global Youth Gathering scheduled for 1992 are evidence of this. However, the report indicates that these goals are yet to be achieved, and therefore must remain priorities. The 1993 world conference on Faith and Order should provide for the full participation and contribution of women and youth.

The Committee regrets that there is no substantive report on the basis of which to evaluate how we have grown in the area of gospel and culture. Further the CPP observes with regret that there is only one area of the report that gives an account of the important contribution of youth in the WCC.

C. The CPP notes the critical financial situation of the WCC due to problems of exchange rates, inflation and insufficient growth in the financial support from member churches proportionate to increased programme costs. The fact that one-third of the member churches take no financial responsibility for the Council is a matter of great concern.

### III. A review of the implementation of the Vancouver guidelines

#### A. *Growing towards unity*

We have yet to develop adequate criteria and indicators by which to assess progress in relationships among member churches. The CPP notes with satisfaction that the response to the *Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry* document from member churches has been very encouraging. The evaluation of the responses from 185 churches reveals a broad measure of convergence in regard to the basic Christian convictions as articulated in the document. It has enabled the churches to look critically at their own traditions and to be willing to change their attitudes towards other churches. This certainly is a step towards unity. Other



documents may also go through this process of study and comment by member churches.

Sharing of ecumenical resources is also part of our growth towards unity. El Escorial 1987 is a landmark on this road though in actual practice we have a long way to go. The fellowship of mutual sharing is something we can achieve while we continue to work for fellowship in faith and in sacramental life. We regretfully recognize, however, that for some of our member churches, some activities of the WCC lead to tensions and questions, but through these tensions and questions we should grow towards greater mutual understanding and unity.

#### *B. Growing towards justice and peace*

The Vancouver assembly said that commitment to justice, peace and the well-being of the whole creation should be one of the purposes of all programmes of the WCC. In general, sub-units had this aim before them in their programmes. The specific effort made through the JPIC process has served to awaken member churches to the urgency of the issues.

In the last seven years we have seen important movement towards liberation, justice and peace for which we give thanks to God. The WCC's share in inspiring some of these changes has not been insignificant. Periodic actions and public statements, letters from the general secretary, visits to areas of conflict by WCC teams, support to churches and groups in their struggle against poverty, oppression and racism, have all been helpful.

#### *C. Growing towards a vital and coherent theology*

Our common faith in the Triune God, and in the incarnation, death and resurrection of our Lord Jesus Christ is the common core that holds us together in our diversity, and should be the basis for coherence in our different theological expressions. While Faith and Order deals with this directly, the other programmes have also been involved in finding a common ground for action. Some lack of coherence is natural in a fellowship like the WCC. Nevertheless, the quest for a coherent theology is crucially important and must remain a priority. In this context, it is important to bring contextual theologies into dialogue with "classical" theologies in order to develop an ecumenical way of doing theology. Such a method must be faithful to the apostolic faith and appreciative of local

cultures through which the gospel is expressed and lived.

#### *D. Growing towards new dimensions of the churches' self-understanding*

It is difficult to specify whether anything concrete has been achieved in this area. Has there been a developing self-understanding by each of the member churches as a result of association with other member churches of the World Council? In the general secretary's words: "This challenge is one which we will continue to explore together."

#### *E. Growing towards a community of confessing and learning*

Confessing Jesus Christ is integral to our being an ecumenical family. All programmes of the WCC serve this vocation. Consultations on world mission and evangelism have signalled that confessing Jesus Christ as Lord and Saviour in a pluralistic world requires unity in mission. The whole process of JPIC seeks to be a witness to the love of God for all humanity manifested in Jesus Christ. Our programmes for the struggle against racism are a testimony to the power of the gospel to break all chains of oppression.

The CPP also notes that meaningful learning has taken place during the period under review. WCC has produced some materials in forms, suitable for use at the congregational level and promoted participatory, experiential and interdisciplinary methods of learning. The Bible study resources produced in preparation for the great meetings of Larnaca, El Escorial, San Antonio, Seoul and this assembly have been particularly important.

### **IV. Vision for the future work of the WCC**

The vision from the assembly for the future work of the Council must be related to the functions of the WCC as given in its constitution, namely the goals of visible unity, the common witness of the churches and the service of human need. We must begin by reaffirming and concentrating on these goals.

#### *A. Unity of the church*

The unity of the church is not something we create but a gift of God which we should receive humbly, promote responsibly and enjoy gratefully. Our common commitment to the fundamentals of Christian faith continues to call and hold us together. That commitment permits us to appreciate the richness of our diversity of gifts, traditions, cultures and



racess. At this assembly we have experienced powerful reminders that the Holy Spirit breaks down barriers and restores community. But we have also experienced painful reminders of continuing brokenness. We understand the task of the WCC to be at the service of the churches in responding to the call of the Holy Spirit to make visible our unity in Christ.

This gift of unity requires that we give attention to all that fragments the body of Christ. The Holy Spirit calls us to acknowledge the unity that exists among us and to overcome all barriers in order to be able to share our gifts and ministries while on our common spiritual journey towards visible unity. Our ability to enable the truthful sharing of differences among us is a sign of the strength of our unity of faith.

Only through this unity in Christ are we able to express our calling to be in mission in a suffering and hurting world. We welcome the call for common theological reflection and a comprehensive discussion on the nature and mission of the church in the perspective of unity as *koinonia* in the Holy Spirit. Through our participation in struggles for justice and liberation we share a common unity through solidarity with all of humanity and can become ecumenical in the fullest sense.

#### *B. Justice, peace and the integrity of creation*

In this assembly we have realized more intensely that the Holy Spirit lays upon us the task which Jesus himself accepted. The Holy Spirit opens our eyes to see the injustice of the world and strengthens us to resist and struggle against oppression and the devastation of creation.

The Holy Spirit calls us to work together towards just social systems and towards a sustainable environment. We seek a world of social and economic justice and care for those who are vulnerable and dispossessed. We seek a world in which all participate in decisions which affect their lives. We seek a world based on the biblical vision of economic and ecological reconciliation. The vision of justice, peace and the integrity of creation needs to become embodied in the realities of our contextual situation. This calls for a broad cooperation with secular groups, between the churches, and with people of other faiths.

We confess that nations which claim to be Christian shoulder a substantial part of the blame for the present global military-industrial-technological civilization insofar as it breeds injustice, ferments wars and disrupts

the eco-balance. The struggle for justice, peace and the integrity of creation may entail the questioning of some of the values on which this civilization is based. This vision should enable the WCC to focus on the central ethical concerns of our time.

Working towards justice, peace and the integrity of creation will help the churches understand their task in the world, provided we develop a rigorous social analysis, deepen our theological reflection and vigorously promote these concerns. This has emerged as the central vision of the WCC and its member churches as they face the next assembly when they can give an account of their efforts to fulfill the covenants made for JPIC.

At Vancouver it was assumed that *participation* was implied in the concept of justice, because justice includes participation in power; however, participation in itself has not received the attention it should. Our future work must be based on local, national, regional and inter-regional contexts. We need to intensify and deepen concrete analysis of the root causes and institutional structures of injustice. Inter-racial, inter-regional and multicultural interaction is essential to new understanding and action without domination of one culture over the other.

#### *C. Wholeness of the mission of the church*

A reconciled and renewed creation is the goal of the mission of the church. This mission requires that the search for the sacramental communion of the church be more closely linked with the struggle for justice and peace. Both these dimensions point to the church as the healing communion in Christ through the Holy Spirit. Wholeness of mission requires that barriers be broken down locally and globally.

The mission of the church must include other issues for the sake of its wholeness. First, at this assembly we have frequently addressed the way in which the gospel inter-relates with culture. Too often the mission of the church has been a rationale for injustice to indigenous peoples. Particularly today, it is important to remember this as we look towards the commemoration of the conquest of Latin America five hundred years ago in the name of the gospel, a misuse of mission.

A second concern for a mission with wholeness is the just sharing of resources among all members of the body of Christ. We seek to better utilize the rich insights and



guidelines for resource sharing already available to the WCC.

A reconciled and renewed creation requires attention to these and many other issues which challenge the wholeness of the community of the people of God.

As we seek to share the message of Christ in word and deed, may we express a holistic evangelism as an ecumenical task of the whole church, rather than of some particular individuals, remembering also that each church acting in mission is acting on behalf of the *whole* church. WCC should undertake the task of helping to equip the churches to fulfill their mission.

While we celebrate the presence of the Holy Spirit in the churches, we are aware that the Spirit is not confined to the churches. We rejoice in our experience of salvation in Christ but recognize the possibility of the presence of the Spirit of God among people of other faiths.

In increasingly plural societies where inter-religious conflict is often a source of injustice and violence, there is a new urgency for interfaith dialogue and for joint action for the well-being of humanity and the creation. The Holy Spirit calls us to engage in dialogue to mutually share our faiths, and to work together for justice, peace, and the integrity of creation.

The wholeness of mission lays on us the necessity for encounters of gospel and culture and witness in a secularized world.

## V. Style of work

### A. Assembly

There is full justification for meeting together once every seven years to celebrate our common faith and witness; however, the cumbersome nature and the current patterns of the assembly call for serious evaluation of the role of the assembly as an efficient way of democratic policy making. There is need for solid biblical and theological input which could become the primary thread that binds the assembly together. Intensive biblical studies should accompany our prayers for renewal. Less time should be spent in presentation plenaries where the delegates can only be passive observers and more time given to plenaries and other formats that promote intensive participation in assembly processes which will better enrich the assembly experience. Delegates should be strongly encouraged to study the theological and other ma-

terials that the WCC and their churches publish in preparation for the assembly.

### B. Committees, consultations and other events

Emphasis on participation is crucial. Careful planning and leadership preparation are essential to enable maximum participation.

Large world conferences should be kept to a minimum. Every attempt should be made to bring different programme concerns into one conference or to have regional conferences. Financial restrictions facing the WCC demand more careful budget planning for all events.

### C. Participation of the whole people of God

We are convinced that the participation of the laity must be strengthened through increased emphasis on lay training and formation in all aspects of ecumenical learning.

We expect that the participation goals for women and youth be maintained in all events and in membership of committees. The central committee should assure funding only for those activities which reflect approved goals of inclusiveness.

We also encourage increased participation of differently abled persons and persons of varying theological traditions including charismatics, pentecostals and evangelical Christians with ecumenical perspectives.

We urge that greater attention be given to the needs of persons from different cultural and language groups and that the WCC language policy be reviewed.

We urge that ways be found to encourage participation in the ecumenical movement and vision without continually underlining and reinforcing the divisions we wish to overcome.

### D. Staff operations

More effective and efficient use of staff resources is needed. The current financial situation underlines the need for improved coherence of the work of different programmes. We therefore:

- question the need for so many sub-units;
- encourage cooperation and sharing;
- urge that duplication be avoided.

We are aware that the outgoing central committee has addressed some of these issues of institutional strengthening. Given the urgency of concerns facing the WCC and the limited financial resources available, we urge that the central committee give continued attention to these matters.



The Committee acknowledges that the recommendations for programme emanating from this assembly will need to be prioritized. This will be a task of the new central committee.

## **VI. Programme policies that should undergird and inspire all WCC programmes in the coming years**

The Holy Spirit calls us to renewal. This renewal means bringing out the truth which was already given by the Spirit. It requires a conscientious effort to act with resolve on our long-standing commitments as well as creating new emphases. More than ever it is necessary to concentrate on the following basic concerns.

### *A. Renewal through reconciliation*

Christians see truth in different ways and are divided from one another by history, doctrine and culture, yet at the same time they are united in Christ and the power of the Holy Spirit. When we pray to the Spirit of unity to reconcile us we become conscious of the need for repentance, reparation and renewal.

The primary task of the WCC is to call the churches to the goal of visible unity in the context of the unity of all humankind, through programmes that foster reconciliation and healing. In the years after this assembly, member churches should study and analyze the remaining obstacles in relation to the recognition of each other's baptism, the acceptance of a common creed, mutual recognition of ministries, and eucharistic participation. While differing in our ecclesiologies we should be willing to address and challenge these differences from an ecumenical perspective. Christian movements should be able to give their contribution to this pilgrimage towards unity. More attention should be given to contextual theology, inculturation and a deeper analysis of the causes of disunity.

There can also be deep divisions between Christians and people of other faiths, even though they share a common humanity and face common challenges and tasks. Dialogue with people of other faiths must continue to be promoted, particularly for cooperation in our common quest for justice, peace and the integrity of creation. Such dialogue is urgent in situations throughout the world where religious communities are divided by fear and mistrust.

### *B. Renewal through freedom and justice*

The freedom which we enjoy as a gift of the Spirit is not only internal and personal. It is a freedom which we are also called to experience in community.

We must continue to address spiritual and physical ill-health evidenced in unfulfilled lives and unjust socio-economic systems that perpetuate societal barriers in our world.

The Spirit of truth re-establishes and restores the integrity of the human person and human relationships within community. However, as Christians, we constantly experience the danger of becoming captives of systems and structures that defy this truth.

Since we are free in order that we may give witness to the justice of the kingdom of God, we reaffirm our challenge to resist injustice, be it economic or political, cultural or social, of gender, race or ecology. The issues of justice, peace and the integrity of creation provide us with an effective framework for accomplishing these goals. The power of the Spirit moves us to strive for the building up of just societies within our local, regional, national and international contexts.

### *C. Renewal through a right relationship with the creation*

The divine presence of the Spirit in creation binds us as human beings together with all created life. But through misinterpretation of our faith and because of human greed the earth we live in is in peril. The signs of the time are an invitation to repent and to establish a right relationship with the whole creation. This requires a new vision and a new understanding of ourselves and God's creation. Therefore the WCC must address itself to the need to develop a new theology of creation which will enable the churches to play a meaningful role in the renewal of creation as part of their mission as well as a new ecumenical understanding of the relationship between ecology and economy. In carrying out this work, the WCC should seek the cooperation of others who have similar concerns. In this regard we particularly recommend that special attention be given to the struggle against racism, giving priority to the rights of indigenous people.

### *D. Renewal through enabling the full participation and contribution of women*

Deepening the churches' solidarity with women in the church and in the whole society should find a central place in the continuing



work of the WCC. We need to continue to strengthen the solidarity of each member church with women, to fully receive their gifts, contributions and perspectives. The goals of the Decade of the Churches in Solidarity with Women need to be visibly expressed in all activities and work by, through, and encouraged by WCC. Churches are to *act* resolutely on this concern and to uphold the goal of visible unity in the building of a renewed community of women and men.

*E. Renewal through an ecumenical spirituality for our times*

An ecumenical spirituality must be grounded in the present realities: life-giving, rooted in scriptures and nourished by prayer, communitarian and celebrating, centred around the eucharist, expressed in service and witness, trusting and confident. Those who live by the Spirit of God must take the cross

for the sake of the world, share the agony of all, and seek the face of God in the depths of the human condition.

The WCC will need to encourage ecumenical spirituality rooted in the disciplines and appropriate for contemporary Christian life. As churches draw closer to each other in the ecumenical pilgrimage, they are increasingly recognizing the significance of Christian lifestyle, of holiness, of a spirituality of non-violence, common prayer, liturgical life, asceticism and sharing.

**VII. Conclusion**

The Committee on Programme Policy presents this report with the hope that it be translated into WCC programmes, faithfully praying:

“Come, Holy Spirit — Renew the Whole Creation”.

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# Book Reviews

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*Evangelisches Kirchenlexikon. International theologische Enzyklopädie*, eds E. Fahlbusch, J.M. Lochman, J. Mbiti, J. Pelikan and L. Fischer. Vol. I: A-F; Vol. II: G-K, 3rd ed. (revised), xii p. + 1412 cols & xi p. + 1534 cols respectively. Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, Göttingen, 1986 and 1989.

In his article "Church" in this new *Evangelical Church Lexicon*, E. Fahlbusch, one of its general editors, insists that a realistic and non-dogmatic ecclesiology must use several levels of analysis to make the diverse elements and dimensions of the subject accessible. A historical, theological and sociological approach, one which analyzes situations contextually, is necessary to understand how the church reacts to changes in social structures and to reassess its relevance to new situations. Only such a variety of perspectives can do justice to such a multi-dimensional theme (cf. EKL II, 1046-1053 and 1087-1094). For Fahlbusch and his co-editors, this is also true of an up-to-date church lexicon which aims not only to give the latest factual information on all areas of theology, but also to report on present-day problems and experiences of church life.

According to the criteria proposed in the preface to the lexicon as a whole (I, iii-v), this has the following implications for the revised version of the EKL.

1. The range of themes cannot be restricted either confessionally or geographically (i.e. to specifically German or European topics). Rather the doctrine and life of the Christian churches must be presented in their global ecumenical context. This purpose is served by the numerous articles on specific regions and countries, documenting the spread of Christianity on all the continents with due attention to local circumstances. There are special articles showing the variety of traditional spiritualities developed over the centuries by the diverse churches. Information is also given about the variety of both theoretical and practical relations between the churches, and about contemporary efforts towards global church unity.

2. Account must be taken of the overall ecumenical picture and of the connection between Christian witness and the particular social and cultural context in which it is made. This is done in articles dealing with different social systems and with political, economic, and social and cultural conditions and developments, and also in a few articles covering sociological studies and their results.

3. There is finally the concern running through the new version of the EKL to tackle current questions and challenges to the Christian message, due partly to the general process of social change, and partly to the growing influence of Asian, African and Latin American countries on the development of Christianity. Classical models do not enable us to understand such problems. But the church's past experiences must still be taken into account insofar as they are essential to a proper understanding of present experience, and a check against theological "tunnel vision". Of course such historical material must be selected in light of the lexicon's overall aim of rescuing theological thought and church life from provincialism, and creating more openness to "evangelical universality" ["evangelische universalität"].

This term "evangelical universality" encapsulates both the programme and the underlying conceptual problematic of the new EKL. To take the problems first: these result inevitably from the tension between the universality which is sought and the particularity implicit in the term "Evangelical". While this may derive originally from the word "evangel" or "gospel", it is used in German-speaking countries primarily as a collective label for the churches issuing from the Protestant Reformation (cf. I, 1198f.). How is this specifically Reformation option related to the universalist, "catholic" approach? This question is dealt with explicitly in Fahlbusch's article on "Church" cited above, where it is said that confessional particularity is the necessary form in which the universality promised in salvation history is realized historically, but that the universal



claim of faith constantly counsels this particularity to transcend itself.

Here we can discuss neither the detailed applications of the lexicon's principles, nor their philosophical/logical justification. Suffice it to note that serious reservations have already been expressed in this regard. The reviewer in *Ökumenische Rundschau*, for example, has criticized the lack of a necessary editorial consensus on "where specific confessional standpoints... have to take a back seat in the interests of the ecumenical perspective, and where they are indispensable precisely in order to communicate that perspective". And he complains that "a confessionally-oriented approach has, not infrequently, been accepted for [some] churches at points where — given the principles established for the lexicon — their presentation should have transcended the limits of the author's 'own ecclesiastical and cultural horizon'" (*Ök. Rundsch.*, 36, 1987, pp.515-517, here p.516).

Another tension between universality and particularity arises from the fact that while the new EKL is given the ambitious sub-title "International Theological Encyclopaedia" (in its first two editions it was simply a "Manual of Church Theology"), its style is that of traditional academic German scholarship (and emphatically and quite unapologetically so). This is true despite the international range of contributors and the basic intention of departing from the strict constraints of the domestic German Protestant outlook which to a great extent characterized the earlier self-understanding of the EKL. It should be noted that an English-language edition of the new EKL, with slightly modified contents, is to be published shortly.

With regard to the ecumenical aspects (as well as those of social history and the human sciences) mentioned above, the new plan of the EKL reflects the changed situation in both church and society in the last third of the 20th century. To take just one example of this fundamental shift, the philological and exegetical disciplines have tended to be eclipsed, perhaps even in the academic world of the university.

It hardly needs to be pointed out that such shifts of emphasis limit both the potential range of material to be covered, and the possibilities of explicating it. Hence a recent reviewer's lament that one could look up Benin and Bhutan in the new EKL, but not Bethlehem! (*Th. Rundsch.* 55, 1990, pp.373-377).

The same reviewer also criticized the complete absence of biographical articles as "an appalling depersonalization of theology". Yet this decision is simply the inevitable consequence of the principles which underlie the lexicon as a whole. It should be noted however that the old EKL (edited by H. Brunotte and O. Weber) had already displayed "a certain economizing" in the provision of *biographical entries* (preface), and that a detailed biographical index is to be included in a planned fifth volume of the new EKL.

Whatever detailed judgment one may make about the underlying concept of the new EKL, its greatest problem will surely arise from its resolute commitment to covering the present-day scene. "The new EKL is over-supplied with... contemporary references and will therefore quickly become dated — and this statement alas, has already become a *vaticinium ex eventu* [a prophecy after the fact]" (*Th. Rundsch.*, *idem.*, p.376). The reviewer is undoubtedly right. One need not even think of the articles related to the erstwhile German Democratic Republic, but only to look up the final entry of volume II: "Kuwait" (II, 1533f.)! All the more reason to rejoice that the new Evangelical Church Lexicon makes quite clear in its opening pages what "the Alpha and Omega" of all theology and scholarship (cf. I,1) *truly* is.

GUNTER WENZ

Dr Gunther Wenz is professor of evangelical theology, with focus on systematic theology and contemporary theological issues, at the Philosophical Faculty I of the University of Augsburg, Germany.

*To Love as God Loves*, by Roberta Bondi. Fortress Press, Philadelphia, 1987, 110pp.

This short book seeks to make accessible the wisdom found in early Christian literature, particularly that which comes from the 4th-6th century monastic tradition. It delves into what the author describes as "biographies, sermons, letters, collections of sayings, stories, dialogues, biblical commentaries and essays from a period of about three hundred years" in order to present a fresh view of the Christian life. In fulfilling her aim, Roberta Bondi is remarkably successful. One puts down the book with a sense of satisfaction, feeling refreshed and nourished.

*To Love as God Loves* does not seek to offer theological speculation but rather the



spirit of Christian living. Consequently we do not find dogmatic teaching concerning the Christian way of life. Instead, a story is told, a saying is reported, a way of behaviour is described, in such wise that we as readers are drawn to reflect and to reach our own conclusions on what the Christian message is about. Our mentors and teachers are principally the monastic men and women who inhabited the rugged Palestinian, Egyptian and Syrian deserts in ancient times, clothing these with their humanity, warmth and practical common sense.

One of the best features of the book is the stories about our early Christian ancestors, and the sayings quoted from them, which so delightfully illustrate the gospel way of living. These accounts and sayings are well-chosen and apt, simple and yet full of wisdom. They all point to the essential evangelical message, namely, that to be a follower of Christ is to be a fully loving person. However, this simple message receives here a freshness that makes one think that one is discovering it for the first time.

In this authentically Christian book, therefore, everything is interpreted in terms of love. The question posed to us constantly in its pages is whether our actions, thoughts and life-styles help us to become loving persons. For example, in the section where the passions are discussed, we read at the beginning that "a passion has as its outstanding characteristic its ability to prevent love" (p.63). Immediately, we know where we stand! A valuable asset is that throughout the book, whatever the aspect of Christian spirituality under consideration, the author always ensures that we make the necessary connections between the ancient desert situation and our own times and culture. The illustrations which she gives in this respect, from 20th-century Western living, are familiar and helpful. This is particularly true when she tackles the concept of humility — so difficult for us — as also when she treats of grace or deals with the passions.

Another helpful characteristic of the book is its emphasis on the fact that becoming truly Christian is a long, slow process. It does not happen overnight, nor does it generally take place in a sudden act of conversion. Rather, only by degrees and with much struggle do we learn to be truly loving, patient, humble and unselfish. The section on introspection is treated well from a Christian standpoint (pp.78-84); and when the author comes to the

topic of prayer, encouraging and comforting suggestions are offered, with each person's unique and free relationship to God being stressed (pp.84ff.).

The conversational and easy style which Bondi employs draws the reader into a dialogue. One feels involved in the back-and-forth movement between the author and her sources. She asks questions, exposes doubts, surfaces difficulties that resonate within us even if we have not actually articulated them ourselves. It is refreshing too to find a book which, without being "on" psychology, is yet full of sound psychological sense!

Worth noting also is the quiet, unproblematic manner in which the author persistently takes care to avoid a sexist approach. She demonstrates clearly her belief in the equality of women and men (see pp.94-95), and makes us aware that there were nuns as well as the monks whom we more frequently encounter, among the wisdom figures, in the desert. It is a pity, however, that she could not find any sayings or stories from these women to support her stance. Her determination not to refer to God in either masculine or feminine pronouns or possessive adjectives is, on the whole, satisfactory but there are places where the resulting sentence structure is clumsy and sometimes is an obstruction to the flow of the passage (see pp.25,28-29,98-100).

I find it very easy to be positive about this book. However, the account of the beginnings of solitary and cenobitic monasticism comes across as rather simplistic (pp.14ff.); and it does seem a little unfair to refer to the discoveries and developments of science and technology only negatively (p.58). Sometimes the author, in her eagerness to make the early Christians intelligible to their sisters and brothers today, seems to adopt a condescending approach. There are no references or notes given, except the references for direct quotations within the text. It would be helpful to have sources for the opinions and statements attributed to some of our more illustrious Christian forebears, for example Gregory of Nyssa (p.60), Irenaeus and Athanasius (p.61), and Evagrius Ponticus (p.71). A select bibliography is included at the end of the book, but this gives no original sources, only some recent English translations. I realize that the absence of notes and references adds to the easy informal style of the book, but it can be disappointing for the serious reader who would like fuller background information.



To sum up, this attractive little book offers good Christian common sense gleaned from early monastic and patristic literature and coinciding with the gospel message, presented in a way that is appealing to the contemporary Christian reader, particularly to the ordinary woman and man trying to understand and live the Christian life in an environment which is often unhelpful or even hostile to Christian values. For such a person this book is a real gem! I intend putting it into the hands of many of my friends.

MARY O'DRISCOLL

Sister Mary O'Driscoll, OP, teaches spiritual and ecumenical theology at the University of St Thomas Aquinas in Rome.

*Romero — A Life*, by James R. Brockman, S.J. Orbis Books, Maryknoll, NY, 1990, 284pp.

The late Archbishop Oscar Arnulfo Romero of El Salvador is one of the modern-day saints of the ecumenical world. His passionate commitment to the poor, especially in his later years, his struggle for justice in his tragically torn country, his nomination to receive the Nobel Peace Prize, and his assassination in 1980 — all are quite well known throughout the world. In the past year a wider public has had the opportunity to see the film *Romero*, a Paulist Pictures production, and thus gain some insight into this Roman Catholic archbishop's remarkable life and ministry.

Most of us, however, know little about the actual details of Romero's life — his family background, his early ministry, his profound spirituality, his many contacts with the Vatican, the constant difficult opposition he endured from the majority of his episcopal colleagues, his underlying theological and ecclesiological motivations and convictions. Father James R. Brockman, in this carefully researched volume, opens to the reader a panoramic and detailed insight into the Romero beyond the headlines, revealing both the complexity and the beautiful simplicity of a priest who surely was "a man of God".

Almost inevitably — such is the fate of great martyrs — the portrait tends to be positive in the extreme. It is impossible not to admire and praise a life such as Romero's. Nevertheless, Brockman makes a determined effort to avoid unstinting praise, stressing Romero's humanness, inner struggles, crises

of conscience and his defeats. The picture that emerges is not that of a "plaster saint", but rather of a down-to-earth priest, rooted in the life of his people and his church. Assailed by many as a "Marxist" and a "revolutionary", Romero's homilies and writings reveal instead a very orthodox catholicism. Far from attempting to introduce new or radical ideas, Romero simply took seriously the scriptures, along with the insights of Vatican II, Medellín and Puebla, which he tried to relate in daily practise to the suffering of the Salvadorean people under the heel of a murderous military regime, where disappearances, torture and death were the order of the day.

An interesting thread throughout is the relationship which Romero maintained with the Roman pontiffs and leading Curia figures of his time. Romero's enemies fed false reports to the Vatican which Romero repeatedly had to counteract. Generally the popes came to support him, but some persons — like Cardinal Baggio — were highly critical of Romero. In late 1978 Bishop Antonio Quarracino (today Archbishop of Buenos Aires, Argentina) was sent as an "apostolic visitor" to El Salvador with the task of recommending to the Vatican an "appropriate course of action". The recommendation was, in the end, that Pope John Paul II should appoint an apostolic administrator *sede plena*, an arrangement that would allow Romero to continue as archbishop in name, but with another actually governing. Fortunately the recommendation was never implemented, but one can well imagine the strain Romero must have felt as, repeatedly, he had to counter a rearguard opposition from leaders of his own church. He expected, and received, all manner of attacks and false accusations from the Salvadorean oligarchy, military and the government officials; but he hoped in vain for greater understanding and backing from his episcopal colleagues. Only Bishop Rivera — Romero's eventual successor — offered strong support. At a time when the unity of the hierarchy could have been so important, the church leadership of El Salvador was openly divided. By contrast Romero had wide support from the people of the nation, who rallied ever more enthusiastically to his cause.

Romero's indomitable opposition to the repressive government is here documented in great detail. Also documented, and surprising to many, is his frequent criticism of the revolutionary movements of the left, for their use of violence and their acts of revenge. Killings,

for whatever reason, were intolerable to Romero, who denounced the perpetrators regardless of their excuses or motivations. Romero's independence of thought sprang from profound gospel roots which assured him that the dignity of every human person should be honoured and respected, that God creates life, and no human being has a right to take it.

One wonders whether today there are other "Romeros" on the world's stage. Saints are more easily recognized in retrospect. The enormity of the violent military repression in Romero's El Salvador seemed to call forth a valiant witness. Less dramatic conditions, still profoundly unjust, such as sullen racism, chronic hunger, the plight of street children, widespread homelessness, unbridled greed and institutionalized discrimination, still surround us, raising the question how these might elicit a Romero-like witness in our own contexts. Brockman does not raise that ques-

tion, save by indirection, but any sensitive reader can scarcely avoid it. Romero's life challenges every Christian conscience to renewed faithfulness.

Two weeks before his death Romero reportedly told a Guatemalan journalist: "A bishop will die, but God's church, which is the people, will never perish." Romero died by an assassin's bullet, but his remarkable witness continues. Bullets cannot destroy the greatness of a human spirit consecrated to God and God's people; this valuable book will further Romero's continuing witness to us today.

EUGENE L. STOCKWELL

Eugene L. Stockwell is the president of ISEDET, the Higher Protestant Institute of Theological Studies, in Buenos Aires, Argentina, and former director of the WCC's Commission on Mission and Evangelism.



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# Books Received

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Abraham, K.C. ed.: *Third World Theologies: Commonalities and Divergences*. Maryknoll, NY, Orbis Books, 1990, 218pp., \$14.95.

Avis, Paul: *Christians in Communion*. London, Geoffrey Chapman, 1990, 160pp., £7.95.

Babcock, William S. ed.: *Paul and the Legacies of Paul*. Dallas, TX, Southern Methodist University Press, 1990, 426pp., \$32.50 cl., \$16.95Pb.

Bennett, Clinton ed.: *Invitation to Dialogue*. London, BCC/CCBI, 23pp., 1990, £1.95.

Birch C. et al. eds: *Liberating Life: Contemporary Approaches to Ecological Theology*. Maryknoll, NY, Orbis Books, 1990, 293pp., \$16.95 Pb.

Brawley, Robert L.: *Centering on God: Method and Message in Luke-Acts*. Louisville, KY, Westminster/John Knox Press, 1990, 256pp., \$11.95.

Brueggemann, Walter: *Power, Providence and Personality: Biblical Insight Into Life and Ministry*. Louisville, KY, Westminster/John Knox Press, 1990, \$8.95.

Bühlmann, Walbert: *With Eyes To See: Church and World in the Third Millennium*. Maryknoll, NY, Orbis Books, 1990, 162pp., \$14.95 Pb.

Chadwick, Owen: *Michael Ramsey: A Life*. Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1991, 432pp., £7.95.

Coalter, M. et al. eds: *The Confessional Mosaic: Presbyterians and Twentieth-Century Theology*. Louisville, KY, Westminster/John Knox Press, 1990, 333pp., \$14.95.

Cone, James H.: *A Black Theology of Liberation: Twentieth Anniversary Edition*. Maryknoll, NY, Orbis Books, 1990, 140pp., \$14.95.

Cypser, Cora E.: *Covenant and Consensus*. Katonah, NY, Kim Pathways, 1990, 264pp., \$11.95.

D'Costa, Gavin ed.: *Christian Uniqueness Reconsidered: The Myth of a Pluralistic Theology of Religions*. Faith Meets Faith Series. Maryknoll, NY, Orbis Books, 1990, 240pp., \$16.95 Pb, \$34.95 cl.

Ellis, Marc H. & Maduro, Otto eds: *Expanding the View: Gustavo Gutiérrez and the Future of Liberation Theology*. Maryknoll, NY, Orbis Books, 1990, 226pp., \$14.95.

Freyne, Seán ed.: *Ethics and the Christian*. Dublin, Ireland, Columba Press, 1991, 156pp., £8.95.

Gill, Robin: *Competing Convictions*. London, SCM Press, 1989, 180pp., £7.95.

Grant, P. & Patel, R. eds: *A Time To Speak. Perspectives of Black Christians in Britain*. London, Council of Churches for Britain and Ireland, 1990, 93pp., £4.50.

Harding, Vincent: *Hope and History: Why We Must Share the Story of the Movement*. Maryknoll, NY, Orbis Books, 1990, \$9.95.

Hodgson, Janet & Kothare, Jayant S.: *Vision Quest: Native Spirituality and the Church in Canada*. Toronto, Ont., Anglican Book Centre, 1990, 213pp.

Horgan, Thaddeus D. ed.: *Walking Together: Roman Catholics and Ecumenism Twenty-five Years after Vatican II*. Grand Rapids, MI, Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1990, 159pp.

*L'icône dans la théologie et l'art*. Etudes théologiques No. 9. Editions du Centre orthodoxe, Chambésy, 1990, 323pp.

Kimball, Charles: *Striving Together: A Way Forward in Christian-Muslim Relations*. Maryknoll, NY, Orbis Books, 1990, 147pp., \$10.95.

Klimek, Nicolaus: *Der Begriff "Mystik" in der Theologie Karl Barths*. Paderborn, Bonifatius Buchverlag, 1990, 294pp.

Kyung, Chung Hyun: *Struggle to be the Sun Again: Introducing Asian Women's Theology*. Maryknoll, NY, Orbis Books, 1990, 159pp., \$14.95 Pb.

*Le "quant-à-soi": Colloque des intellectuels juifs*. Textes présentés par Jean Halpérin et Georges Lévitte. Paris, Editions Denoël, 1991, 229pp.

Littell, Franklin: *A Half Century of Religious Dialogue, 1939-1989*. Lewiston, NY, Edwin Mellen Press, 1989, 355pp.

Loades, Ann ed.: *Feminist Theology: A Reader*. Louisville, KY, Westminster/John Knox Press, 1990, 340pp., \$16.95.

Lubarsky, Sandra B.: *Tolerance and Transformation: Jewish Approaches to Religious Pluralism*. West Orange, NJ, Behrman House Inc, 1990, \$25.-.

Morris, Rosemary ed.: *Church and People in Byzantium*. Birmingham, University of Birmingham, 1990, 296pp., £14.-.

Neusner, Jacob: *Jews and Christians: The Myth of a Common Tradition*. London, SCM Press, 1991, 170pp.

Neville, Robert Cummings: *Behind the Masks of God: An Essay Toward Comparative Theology*. Albany, NY, State University of New York Press, 1991, 200pp., \$14.95.

Nolan Fewell et al.: *Compromising Redemption: Relating Characters in the Book of Ruth*. Louisville KY, Westminster/John Knox Press, 1990, 142pp., \$11.95.

O'Neill, Maura: *Women Speaking, Women Listening: Women in Interreligious Dialogue*. Faith Meets Faith Series. Maryknoll, NY, Orbis Books, 1990, 131pp., \$14.95 Pb, \$34.95 Cl.

Ormerod, Neil: *Introducing Contemporary Theologies*, Australia, E.J. Dwyer, 1990, 180pp., £6.95.

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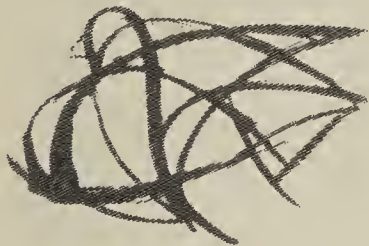
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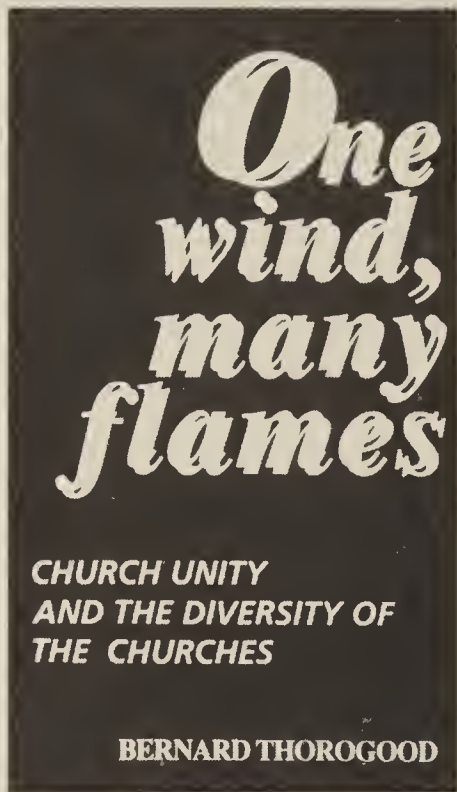
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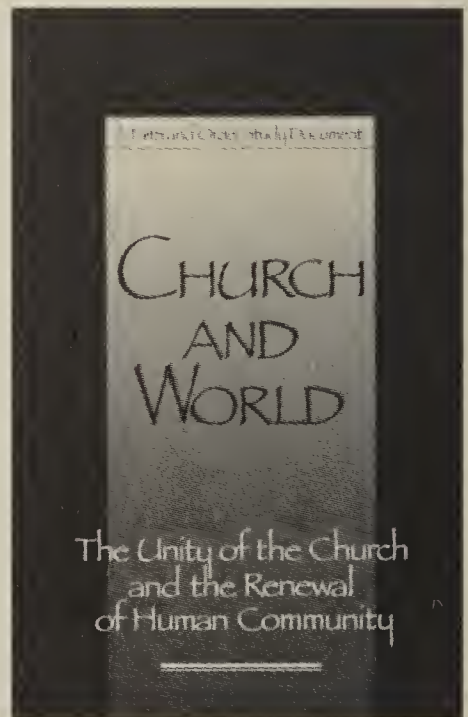
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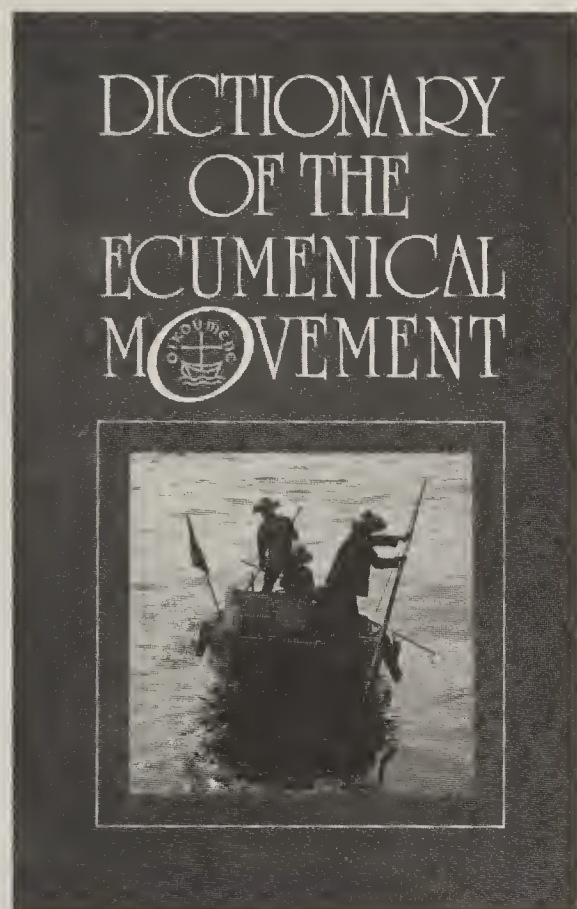
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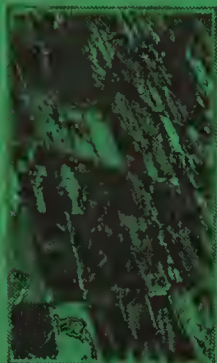
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